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Introduction by Robert Jervis

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**Paul R. Pillar.** *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, 9/11, and Misguided Reform.* Columbia University Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-231-15792-6 (cloth, \$29.50).

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Review by Carl W. Ford Jr., Independent Scholar

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Paul Pillar's *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy* leaps off the page. It is a hard-hitting no-holds-barred personal account of the complex twenty-first century nexus between intelligence and foreign policy. His examples, 9/11, the Iraq War, Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and the politicization of intelligence—deep dive issues all—are examined in detail. He brings to the task his experiences as an intelligence officer, and his scholarly achievements at Georgetown University, providing the important perspective of a practitioner's look inside decision-making theory's "black box."

From the first pages he is in attack mode, eagerly telling his side of the story, often quite passionately, leaving no doubt where he stands on the book's key focus: the 9/11 Commission's role in intelligence reform; the Iraq War, President Bush's decision-making; and the responsibility for politicizing intelligence. Support for his views, however, sometimes falls short.

For the purpose of this review, I have organized my comments around five of the book's themes: uncertainty, 1) the decision to go to war in Iraq, 2) WMD Intelligence's Role in the Policy Process, 4) the Bush administration's politicization of intelligence, and 5) the 'close versus distant' question.

While my five themes do not do justice to the depth and breadth of the materials covered by *Intelligence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, I have chosen them with an acknowledgment of my own limitations. The analytical lens I use as a reviewer is colored by my own experiences and expertise. First and foremost, I am an intelligence officer,<sup>1</sup> one who for a time served as a policy-maker,<sup>2</sup> and at the end of my career was given the opportunity to develop and teach a seminar—Executive Branch Decision-making—for Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. While each of these experiences provided me some level of expertise, they are also responsible for cultivating my biases and strong opinions, for which I make no apologies.

1) Policy-makers and general readers can learn much from the author's insights into uncertainty, the degree of which the Intelligence Community (IC) often fails to articulate clearly. The first lesson is "We should not be surprised to be surprised." (337) He is talking specifically about "tactical surprise . . . which is harder to reduce, let alone eliminate, than strategic surprise. . . because it involves unobservable and perhaps unattainable things such as an adversary's secret plans." (337)

Most policy-makers do not see surprise this way. They fail to accept his second lesson that it is "Sheer complexity . . . that foils prediction," (220) not secrecy. Policy-makers, despite the consequences of surprise and uncertainty that appear throughout the book, want

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accurate predictions, not excuses. For them warning—strategic, tactical, or whatever—is the IC’s primary function. (8-9) If it cannot prevent another 9/11, then why is the government spending so much money on intelligence? (243)

Uncertainty is something that is not a problem for intelligence officers. The common refrain I hear from them is ‘Policy-makers don’t get it, we are not seers or mind readers.’ This, in fact, mirrors almost exactly the explanation of uncertainty the author presents in the book. For him uncertainty is a fundamental element in the policy nexus. He also highlights the serious consequences of this disconnect between policy-makers and intelligence officers. (9-10)

I wholeheartedly agree. If taken to heart, the book’s insights into uncertainty could dispel many of the myths that policy-makers hold about what intelligence can and cannot do. That would be a major accomplishment in its own right. I would only add that intelligence officers tend to give in to criticism too easily, always promising to do better next time, and marching on without complaint. Many, as the author notes, even buy into the policy-makers’ sometime cockamamie plans to fix, or reform the IC. (295) Their only request: ‘Give us more money.’

What intelligence officers ought to do is to fight harder for their beliefs, to stand firmly behind their analysis of the threat. Perhaps they fear being marginalized or isolated from the intelligence-policymaker process. Whatever the cause, inaction has wrought havoc on the IC’s ability to produce much more than a daily Top Secret newspaper. Larger budgets will not fix the problem. Pouring more money and human resources into taming surprise only insures many of the policy-makers’ urgent problems will go unaddressed.

2) The author believes the decision to go to war in Iraq was made without the benefit of an orderly policy process. His case rests on the proposition that “There was not just a poor policy process or an incomplete one or a biased one; there was no policy process.” (432) If this is not correct, a number of the book’s other conclusions are suspect. For his evidence the author cites anecdotes from members of the Bush Administration after the war. (13) (14) (327) I am confident that the author and his sources believe what they say. The historical record, however, argues otherwise.

Bob Woodward’s *Bush at War*, and *Plan of Attack*, provide a detailed account of the policy process starting early in the Bush Administration. The first reference came in February 2001, when the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, chaired a Principals meeting to review Iraq policy. Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, and CIA’s Deputy Director John McLaughlin sat in for George Tenet.<sup>3</sup> Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley followed up, chairing four Deputies meetings on Iraq policy between 31 May and 26 July.<sup>4</sup> Later the Deputies presented a Top Secret paper to the Principals on August 1, entitled, “A Liberation Strategy” proposing “...a phased strategy of

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 21.

pressuring Saddam and developing the tools and opportunities for enhancing that pressure....”<sup>5</sup>

Then the United States experienced 9/11. From where I sat, I believe the President and his advisors viewed the idea of a direct terrorist threat to the homeland as only a remote possibility. But the unthinkable happened. Thousands died. Responding to the attack became all-consuming. In that process, Iraq got its share of attention. It began with Secretary Rumsfeld musing about attacking Iraq in a meeting with his staff shortly after the attack on the Pentagon.<sup>6</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld mentioned Iraq again the next day at a Principal’s meeting.<sup>7</sup> Iraq also came up at Camp David, first by National Security Advisor Rice and then Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz.<sup>8</sup> Also at Camp, David Secretary Rumsfeld came back to the issue a third time in the form of a question.<sup>9</sup> But the President had heard enough. He turned the focus of the discussion back to Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

Then there is in fact a gap in Iraq policy discussions. Iraq did not come up again until after the Administration’s first successes in Afghanistan. On 21 November 2001, the President directed Secretary Rumsfeld to start contingency planning for Iraq. “I want to know what the options are,” he recalled. “A president cannot decide and make rational decisions unless I understand the feasibility of that which may have to happen.”<sup>11</sup> On 28 December, the President received his first Iraq briefing from General Franks at the ranch in Crawford, Texas. Other principals participated via video.<sup>12</sup> During the discussion DCI Tenet indicated the CIA was overextended and urged caution.<sup>13</sup> On 3 January 2002, the President and others received a briefing from the CIA indicating: “...covert action would not remove Saddam. The CIA would not be the solution.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Woodward, *Bush At War*, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 52-66.

<sup>13</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 64.

<sup>14</sup> Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 72.

In addition, a series of at least ten Principal meetings devoted to Iraq were held between January and August 2002.<sup>15</sup>

I submit these events from February 2001 through August 2002 clearly constitute a policy process. Although it is fair to criticize the policy choices President Bush made, and many do, it is a different matter altogether to conclude there was no policy process at all.

3) The author argues the IC's views on WMD did not have, and could not have had, any influence on the decision to go to war in Iraq, because the policy-makers had made up their minds prior to the October 2002 National Estimate (NIE). (13)

Given that there was a policy process; and that either DCI George Tenet or his CIA Deputy John McLaughlin were present at the numerous briefings and Principals' meetings during 2001-2002; and that the President was briefed daily on at least CIA's views; it is unclear why the author thinks as he does. He points to the October NIE as a crucial piece of evidence, but argues that the decision to go to war had been made long before. (35) But, exactly when that decision was made he does not say.

I agree that the evidence clearly indicates that the President had demonstrated a willingness to use military force to oust Saddam Hussein before October 2002, and that by the time of the estimate he may have concluded military action was the only way to insure regime change. It is also clear the NIE was used to help in "selling the war." (28) However, to conclude intelligence analysis did not play a role in the policy process is a stretch.

The views expressed in the NIE did not just appear because the Congress (36) asked for the October estimate. The IC's assessment of Iraq's WMD programs began to shift as early as March 2001 when reporting suggested, "Iraq was seeking high-strength tubes made of 7075 T6 aluminum alloy."<sup>16</sup> This was followed by a Department of Energy (DOE) Intelligence Highlight in April for policy-makers examining Iraq's interest in "High Strength Aluminum Tube Procurement."<sup>17</sup> When the IC obtained samples of the aluminum tubes in June,<sup>18</sup> senior policy-makers were informed before many in the IC were told. By August, the National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) had concluded the tubes could not be used for conventional rockets.<sup>19</sup> And DOE had published a Technical Note, entitled, "Iraq's Gas

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<sup>15</sup> Carl Ford, *Iraq Timeline*, (prepared for seminars at Georgetown and George Mason Universities: 2004-2009).

<sup>16</sup> Report to the President of the United States: *The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction*, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), 55.

<sup>17</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 199.

<sup>18</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 198.

<sup>19</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 199.

Centrifuge Program: Is Reconstitution Underway.”<sup>20</sup> DOE circulated a similar report on 13 September.<sup>21</sup> In November the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) weighed in with its view, “Iraq Procuring Possible Nuclear-Related Gas Centrifuge Equipment.”<sup>22</sup> Before Christmas 2001, a Senior Executive Memorandum was published discussing the implications of Iraq’s procurement of the aluminum tubes.<sup>23</sup> Followed in March 2002, by another Executive Memorandum assessing, “The Status of Iraq’s Uranium Enrichment Program.”<sup>24</sup>

My recollection is that by March 2002, individual agencies had circulated their positions on nuclear reconstitution to the policy community on several occasions, previewing the views that were later incorporated into the October NIE. Throughout the summer, a flurry of papers and briefings hammered home agency positions. When the Congress asked for an estimate, (36) I remember thinking, ‘Why in the world would they want an NIE?’ INR’s and the other agencies’ views were well known, policy-makers’ in-boxes had received a steady diet of WMD assessments for months, and I had participated in several congressional briefings before the estimate was finalized in October. I grant that the NIE was put together quickly, but virtually every word in the estimate had been written and disseminated by one agency or another months before. Agency positions appearing in the estimate essentially remained unchanged since March of 2002. The WMD Commission agreed.<sup>25</sup>

From my perspective, the claim that “...WMD was not the principal driver of the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq, and the famously flawed intelligence analysis on the subject had no or almost no influence on the decision,” (15) does not ring true. The President, his advisors, and members of Congress were traumatized by 9/11 as much or more than the American people. It happened on their watch. They swore to protect the nation from all threats, foreign and domestic. They failed. When the IC unprompted reached the judgment Iraq had restarted its nuclear weapons program, were policy-makers supposed to ignore it? Did it not suggest these materials might fall into the hands of terrorists? Many Americans certainly thought so. Their fear was real. Indeed, without WMD I cannot see how President Bush could have sold going to war to the Congress or the American people. Pillar’s “Principal driver” (15) may overstate the influence WMD intelligence had on decision-makers, but his arguing that IC findings were not a major factor ignores the historical record.

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<sup>20</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 198.

<sup>21</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 199.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *WMD Commission Report*, 200.

<sup>25</sup> *WMD Commission*, 183.

4) Chapter 6, “Politicization”, is in many ways the heart of the book. The author argues that administration officials intimidated analysts to such a degree they were forced to alter their views on key issues, and that they, in effect, provided the script for selling the Iraq war. He writes, “Understanding how politicization infected the intelligence community’s own work requires understanding the environment that the Bush administration’s push for war created and in which intelligence officers functioned. Such understanding is difficult for anyone who did not experience the environment firsthand.” (147)

My experiences were far different, but so too, as the author points out, were the findings of Senate Intelligence Committee investigators (152), and the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (152-153). Both investigations dispute the book’s claims of politicization. Maybe it is because Pillar’s definition of politicization is different. Politicization, for me, requires a policy-maker applying pressure, and an intelligence officer bending to that pressure. In the period in question, I witnessed the former, but not the latter. For the vast majority of intelligence officers there is no room in intelligence for the officer who cannot say no, or who only feels comfortable bringing policy-makers good news. The notion of speaking truth to power for most of us is not just a cliché. It is our honor code.

There may also be differences in what we see as the role intelligence officers play in the policy process. The author’s “text book” model, in which intelligence plays a “guiding role,” (5) and where policy-makers look to the wise men in the IC for advice before making a decision, does not exist in my vision. He also argues that “...most prewar intelligence analysis on Iraq was good, especially regarding the prospective consequences of the war. The policy implication of the intelligence community’s work on Iraq was to avoid the war, not to launch it.”(4) I disagree on both counts.

First, the work produced by the IC was not very good.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes it guessed right,<sup>27</sup> in other cases it was “dead wrong.”<sup>28</sup> In both cases, the IC’s opinions primarily were based on a handful of HUMINT reports, and on the background knowledge of a few smart intelligence analysts. No one had much hard evidence; but everyone had strong opinions. In-depth research backing up analysis was missing. Accordingly, policy-makers were free to choose answers, picking those they liked, and ignoring those that conflicted with their cognitive worldview.

Second, my mentors, starting with Eva Watkins at DIA, taught me that intelligence officers do not make policy. Any report suggesting how a problem might be solved stops being an intelligence product. The job of an intelligence officer is to provide policy-makers with new

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<sup>26</sup> *WMD Commission*, 194.

<sup>27</sup> The author and the analysts, who prepared the NIE, *Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq*, have much to be proud about. Unlike the WMD estimate, *Post-Saddam Iraq*, could have and should have been heeded by the policy-makers. Even if the NIE had not changed minds on an invasion, a better understanding of what might lay ahead should, at a minimum, have alerted policy-makers to review Phase IV of their plan.

<sup>28</sup> *WMD Commission Report, Letter to the President*, 31 March 2005.

knowledge, trends, the why's, cultural context, insights into the adversary, etc., not what the policy-maker should do with that knowledge. But there is also no rule that says policy-makers must accept what the IC tells them. I was taught that it is the analyst's fault if policy-makers do not listen. My mentors' mantra was, 'produce quality intelligence and most intellectually honest people will pay attention.' The IC's analysis on Iraq's WMD programs was not 'quality intelligence.'

There were also times when the IC did more than just "get it wrong" or "make mistakes." The WMD Commission found that NGIC; DIA's HUMINT Service; and CIA's Weapons Intelligence, Nonproliferation, and Arms Control Center (WINPAC) "...made such serious errors, or resisted admitting their errors so stubbornly, that questions may fairly be raised about the fundamental culture or capabilities of the organizations themselves."<sup>29</sup>

Most shocking to me personally, was the attempt by CIA to make it appear that a contractor had successfully built a centrifuge using the aluminum tubes taken from the shipment bound for Iraq. That was only part of the story. Eventually, my analysts were able to contact the contractor directly to get more details. It turned out that the centrifuge worked for an hour or two then broke down. The exact reason, DOE had said a year earlier, it thought no one in their right mind would choose the tubes for building centrifuges—the tubes would be unreliable and tend to break down frequently. Given that the tubes were a key element in the argument that Iraq had reconstituted its nuclear weapons program, I think it is fair to say this unprofessional behavior was especially egregious. It influenced policy, but in the wrong way.

There is a right way to make a difference, to participate in, and to influence the policy process, but it is not easy. I was taught that to communicate effectively with a policy-maker your message must be policy relevant. Intelligence analysis is not an academic exercise. Unless it is something policy-makers have asked for, or they need, it is a waste of time and taxpayer money. It is not enough to produce new knowledge, or to work on topics analysts think interesting. The IC works for the policy-makers in the Executive Branch and the Congress, not a university or a think tank. Helping them understand the problems and challenges they face is job one.

Anticipating what a policy-maker needs is also key. You cannot always wait for them to ask a question. (14) Equally important, it is not enough for intelligence to be relevant and interesting. If the work does not land on a policy-maker's desk at the right time, it has limited, if any, impact. I have found that following the collection schedule, more than a policy-maker's appointment book, is one of the quickest ways to miss opportunities for helping the policy-makers.

As long as the IC only aspires to be a classified *Washington Post* or *New York Times*, the IC will fall short of its customers' wants and needs. Policy-makers want substance. Just like the best medical reporter at CNN is unlikely to discover a cure

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<sup>29</sup> WMD Commission, 195.

for prostrate cancer, you should not expect analysts utilizing current reporting's 'read and remember' techniques to provide the detailed answers policy-makers could use most. Complex questions are not answered by current reporting. Tough problems require research, something the IC does not do much anymore.<sup>30</sup>

Most important, too many analysts forget that policy-makers are not particularly interested in their opinions, especially when it is a subject already important to them. On most issues, policy-makers have opinions of their own, opinions that they have developed over years. Getting them to change their minds requires presenting them reasons for adjusting their thinking. That is why intelligence analysis is so difficult. It must be persuasive. Educated opinions are never a substitute for evidence.

I believe that the image depicted in the book of intelligence officers bending to pressure applied by hard headed, opinionated policy-makers is highly exaggerated. The intelligence officers I have known do not back down so easily. The more pressure they feel, the harder they dig in their heels. Some officers deal with pressure better than others, and, unfortunately, there are a few bad apples, but changing one's analysis to please a policy-maker will be noticed and the officer in question risks losing the trust of his or her peers. Once lost, gaining back that trust is almost impossible. If intelligence officers can no longer take their colleagues' word at face value, the system breaks down.

5) The author would have the IC distance itself from the policy-makers, especially those in the Executive Branch, believing otherwise the danger of politicization is too great: The IC "... should be given an institutional status that makes it more of an assuredly independent, unpoliticized voice." (314)

In my view, the effectiveness of the IC has nothing to do with being 'close' or 'distant,' it is the quality of intelligence that counts. I find the intelligence officers who debate the 'close versus distant' issue often have little idea what policy-makers do, or the type of intelligence they would find most useful.

For most policy-makers the amount of information they receive daily is not their primary concern. Officials want to keep track of events as they happen, of course, but knowing the latest events in Syria goes only so far in providing policy-makers the knowledge and insights they need to make good decisions. What policy-makers want most is help in understanding the complexities of foreign and national security policy. When they are focused on a problem their demand for details is insatiable. At other times, almost everything else you send them gets at best only a cursory look.

Two things are certain. First, submitting only 'current' news does not cut it. It cannot provide the details policy-makers want. Second, offering 'policy comments' only makes it worse. Once policy-makers suspect intelligence officers of letting personal policy

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<sup>30</sup> *WMD Commission*, 25.

preferences influence their analysis, the credibility of any future judgments is forever questioned.

The IC has much to offer policy-makers. Its experts are second to none, and the bank of knowledge they have stored is amazing. Having smart analysts is not enough, however. Unless the policy-maker finds the IC's information persuasive, time and effort will be wasted. Intelligence is not about what the IC thinks; it is about 'show me your evidence.' There is no place for take it or leave it in intelligence. (314) Close or 'distant' means little when the IC's message is unconvincing. 'Cozying up' to the policy-makers alone does not make the intelligence more credible. When you get there you must be able to back up what you say with convincing evidence.