

The politicization of intelligence



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the ability of policymakers to influence the importance placed on topics of the public agenda. To accomplish this, research is conducted through the instrumental case study of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 to gain an understanding of a phenomenon such as politicization and how it affects intelligence and policy agenda. Recognizing the presence of politicization in the decision to invade Iraq is important, because this event is one of the *most* significant events and policy decisions made in Middle Eastern and United States history. Moreover, research will highlight policy makers' decision to go to war based on weak intelligence, while portraying to the public an imminent threat to national security. Further examination will draw attention to how intelligence played such an insignificant role in policy makers' decision to invade Iraq. Further study will help identify the political failures which led up to what people saw as one of the biggest intelligence failures in United States history. The knowledge gained will hopefully answer the question: How does intelligence become politicized?

“ Politicization – the shading of analysis to fit prevailing policy or politics – is the harshest criticism one can make of an intelligence organization. It strikes beyond questions of competence to the fundamental ethic of the enterprise, which is, or should be, truth telling.

-Michael Hayden

Introduction

Politicization is a word policymakers and intelligence agencies are familiar with, however there is no universal or similar answer or definition for what it is. Imperative to understand, however is how important it is to recognize how politicization can severely affect intelligence. Multiple forms of politicization are present in policymakers' approach to WMDs before the Iraq war began and highlighted in Gregory Treverton's "Intelligence for an Age of Terror". Treverton observes the following five forms: "direct pressure, cherry-picking, question-asking, house line and shared mindset" (2009, 173-174). The concept of politicization and its presence in the intelligence community (IC) has been hard to outright prove by intelligence officials and is not openly admitted by policymakers who politicize intelligence. By utilizing an agenda-setting theory, I hope to identify external pressures, such as policymakers, through their use of media to politicize intelligence. These pressures may heavily influence the importance of topics relating to the public agenda. For example, apply this theory when policymakers use the media to gain favor of the public to satisfy a political agenda, such as President Bush's State of the Union address.

The Bush administration politicized intelligence pertaining to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) in Iraq, and as a result used it as justification to invade in 2003. Prior to 2003, intelligence officials provided information about the presence of WMDs, despite being labeled as weak intelligence by analysts. Additionally, the analysts marked the information "not for release", based on the fact the intelligence was unconfirmed by any additional supporting information. Nevertheless, the administration politicized the intelligence gathered by cherry-picking certain parts of the

intelligence to fit their political agenda. Prior to and during the invasion of Iraq, there was no physical evidence of WMDs, naturally the public wanted answers. As a result, whispers of how analysts are being pressured to produce intelligence to meet the policymakers' need for an Iraqi regime; politicians assuring the need for pressure on the Intelligence Community in order to excel; even the White House shifting all the blame on the IC for not producing valid intelligence relating to WMDs.

Marked as one of the most important historical events between the Middle East and the United States, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was also a highly politicized event. After September 11, 2001, considering Al Qaeda's attack on the World Trade Center, it was evident the United States needed to respond to the terrorist attack with full force. As a result, President George W. Bush and his administration stepped in and utilized intelligence of prewar WMD's, as a reason to justify going to war. The 9/11 attacks provided the perception and ammunition which allowed the Bush administration to focus on Iraq, specifically the Saddam regime, and convince the public the regime was behind the terrorist operation by supporting Al Qaeda. Alternatively, intelligence had no real involvement in one of the most important domestic and foreign policy decisions in recent history.

Prior to President Bush, the IC had already identified the presence of WMDs in Iraq by the Clinton administration. Consequently, President Clinton's administration then approved funding for the Iraqi opposition, and intended to bomb the identified WMD sites in Iraq...invading Iraq was never the intent of the Clinton administration; presumably due to information gaps in intelligence to show any threat from Iraq regarding WMDs. Instead,

intelligence suggested the possibility of Iraq conducting low level research on nuclear weapons; Iraq provided no evidence in engaging in any terrorist activities against the United States. Additionally, the administration had no valid information indicating Iraq supplied nuclear-related materials to any terrorist groups. Clearly, in this situation, politicization transpired the minute the administration used policy to drive intelligence, as well as altering the perception of intelligence on WMDs to win public support for its decision to go to war. While inquiring “ how does intelligence become politicized?” leads to the hypothesis of: the moment policy drives intelligence, as well as altering the perception of intelligence, is the moment policymakers have politicized intelligence.

Literature Review

Politicization Defined

The word “ politicize” first came to be in 1907, when a German historian by the name of Karl Lamprecht “ spoke of die Politisierung der Gesellschaft [the politicizing of society], although in the harmless sense of increasing interest in politics.” (Palonen 2003, 181) During WWI, to “ politicize” something took on a negative connotation by the Germans; consequently it changed the concept of politics and “ the negative connotations with which politicization is associated today” said Beth Eisenfeld (2016, 79), an Adjunct Instructor at Henley-Putnam University for Strategic Security courses. Furthermore, Kari Palonen (2003, 182), academic professor and Director of the Finnish Centre of Excellence in Political Thought and Conceptual Change notes “ politicization means detecting the political potential of some existing

changes, shifts, or processes.” In the political area, when it comes to incorporating politicization into intelligence processes, “intelligence connotes power; proximity to policymakers implies influence; and influence, relative to intelligence, leads to claims of politicization—a word with many interpretations.” said Eisenfeld (2016, 18). Intelligence, when driven by a political agenda, is subject to politicization and therefore risks being undermined in efficiency and accuracy.

Glenn Hastedt (2013, 7), a professor and chair of the Justice Studies Department at James Madison University, suggests an approach of keeping the two separate using the “arm’s length perspective, which seeks to wall off intelligence analysis from the broader political system. The co-mingling of the two spheres results in the politicization of intelligence which undermines the analytic process.” Similar in thought, Stephen Marrin, who teaches courses in the Intelligence Analysis program in the Department of Integrated Science and Technology at James Madison University, calls this approach “the proximity hypothesis’ which suggests that greater distance between intelligence and policy produces a more accurate but less influential product whereas greater closeness leads to increased influence but decreased accuracy.” (2013, 2)

Relationship between Intelligence and Policy

In addition to the proximity hypothesis, Marrin (2013, 1) also illustrates the relationship between intelligence and policy, as having “its ups and downs; sometimes the relationship is a good where communication flows and both sides benefit from the interaction. However, sometimes difficulties arise and

problems develop; such as when knowledge is required for decision but is not available or is inaccurate the outcome is frequently described as an intelligence failure.” In terms of confronting intelligence as a failure, Hastedt (2013, 8) accounts “ in the blame game over intelligence failures there is evidence policymakers were alerted to a problem, which is easily finessed by policymakers with the rebuttal that while the intelligence on the subject may have been presented it was not convincing.” Additionally, a subset of intelligence failures “ occurs when knowledge is distorted in order to reinforce or oppose policymaker preferences or expectations. A further less successful outcome occurs when good, accurate knowledge is not used to improve policy, but is instead set aside or ignored by those who have the responsibility and obligation to make decisions” said Marrin (2013, 1). For instance, prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, President George W. Bush politicized intelligence to garner support from the public to support an already made political decision. Nevertheless, once politicization took hold and recognized by the masses, after the war in Iraq began in 2003 “ the tide turned back to the emphasis on keeping intelligence analysis free from political pressures” Uri Bar-Joseph said (2013, 348). Unfortunately the emphasis for separation was too little too late for one of the biggest “ intelligence failures” in recent history.

The 2003 U. S. Invasion of Iraq

Professor Scott Lucas, also founder and editor of EA WorldView, a website whose mission statement proclaims “ we seek to provide news and analysis, through engagement with those on the ground facing the challenges of conflict, deprivation, and environmental change” (2018), highlights

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politicization pertaining to the invasion of Iraq as “ distinguished by an unprecedented outcome, turning analysis into a *casus belli* for an overt military operation in pursuit of regime change.” (2011, 208) Professor Paul Pillar, who teaches at Georgetown University’s Center for Security Studies, as well as a 28 year CIA veteran, also contributes to *The National Interest* , which is an international affairs magazine associated with the realist school of foreign policy thought. Pillar observed the fault of nonexistent WMDs did not fall on the intelligence community as policymakers would want the public to believe; alternatively, Pillar (2006, 17) felt the intelligence on Iraq “ is not that it got things wrong and thereby misled policymakers; it is that it played so small a role in one of the most important U. S. policy decisions.”

Raymond Hinnebusch (2007, 220), professor of International Relations and Middle East Politics at the University of St. Andrews observed how the administration turned intelligence into a political agenda in “ The US Invasion of Iraq: Explanations and Implications”, claiming:

The issue of WMDs was hit upon as a way to turn the ‘ war on terrorism’ against Iraq; to do so, Bush had to claim Saddam Hussein was linked to al-Qaida and was actively developing weapons of mass destruction that he might turn over to terrorists or use on their behalf, and hence Iraq represented an imminent threat to the US.

Additionally, Pillar (2006, 19) pointed out how Bush, in his State of the Union address, cherry picked intelligence when he addressed Iraq “ was purchasing uranium ore in Africa. Analysts questioned the credibility of the report making this claim, kept it out of their own unclassified products, and advised the White House not to use it publicly.” Not only did the administration

cherry pick information, Robert Jervis (2010, 132), a social scientist and expert in international politics adds to the theory of “‘ stove piping’, when the administration delivered selected bits of raw intelligence to policymakers, bypassing intelligence analysts who could critically evaluate them.”

Treverton, who has “ served as chair of the U. S. National Intelligence Council (NIC), the Director of National Intelligence’s interagency arm for both current intelligence support to senior policymakers and more strategic analysis” (APCO Worldwide LLC., 2018) said politicization is not only manipulating specific intelligence such as Bush did in his State of the Union speech, but to also note it is “ part of a bureaucratic battle for influence and control; involving the effort of the policymaker to assert control as they ‘ press’ analysts ‘ to the point of discomfort’” (2009, 173). What’s more, the decision to go to war was not justified by intelligence, but through the politicization of intelligence by inherently cherry picking unsubstantiated intelligence and tailoring it to meet a specific political agenda. In the spring of 2002, imagery analysts had captured pictures of what looked to be vehicles carrying chemical weapons. However, there was nothing other than a picture and a theory to confirm actual presence of nuclear weapons. So for the spring and summer of 2002, “ analysts argued over what the imagery meant, and there is little evidence they resolved the debate. However, later that year, in October, a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) confidently declared Iraq was actively producing chemical weapons and already possessed one hundred tons to five hundred tons of chemical agent” (Rovner

2011, 137). There was no intelligence which supported this claim, if there was... it was not supported by the IC.

External factors of Intelligence Politicization

Through much research on the politicization of intelligence, there is a large focus on the policymaking process, where it is likely to transpire. However, external factors also contribute to politicized intelligence, which according to Eisenfeld (2016, 78) include “ individual citizens, organizations who provide policy research and advice (think tanks), the media (both traditional and new), and lobbyists contribute to politicized intelligence.” Media has been used as far back as World War II, where news radio would relay information to the public about the war, which supported political agenda. Fast forward to today, there are various, if not multiple news agencies (CNN, Fox News, ABC, NBC, CBS, etc.) pushing out perfectly scripted stories, ensuring the information is politically correct, and as Rovner (2013, 261) points out is, “ mostly consistent with the sitting presidential administration’s public policy.” Furthermore, individual citizens have access to personal social media which allows them to contribute and therefore risk politicizing intelligence, by sharing real time information involving volatile political events which require government response by the public. Thereby, information from social media is easily shared by millions which allows for easy access to the public, policymakers and the intelligence community alike. Lastly, organizations who provide policy research and advice, such as Research AND Development (RAND) Corporation and the Brookings Institution are think tanks associated with the government and relied on tremendously by elected leaders. According to Tevi Troy (2012), these organizations are “ highly influential in

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our politics; their research and scholars are heavily consulted and relied on; and in a time of both daunting policy challenges and highly polarized political debates, there is every reason to expect that think tanks will grow only more important in Washington.” With all these external factors playing into how intelligence is received, perceived and relayed to policymakers, it is also important to note the effect this has on the intelligence community. Political activists, various media outlets and the multitude of think tanks out there provide an ample amount of “intelligence” to policymakers. As a result, this poses a very real threat to intelligence agencies, whose main responsibility is to provide intelligence to policymakers. With the various outlets of information, the agencies need to be able to contribute to the policymaking process in order to remain relevant.

Methodology

It is important to recognize how politicization, at times, can affect intelligence to the point of being labeled a “failure” by policymakers and the public. By utilizing an agenda-setting theory, I hoped to identify any possible external pressures, such as policymakers and their political agendas, which through the use of politicization influences intelligence. These pressures have shown a significant impact on the importance of topics relating to the public agenda. An example of this theory is when policymakers use the media to gain favor of the public to satisfy a political agenda, such as President Bush’s State of the Union address. To further analyze the politicization of intelligence, I conducted qualitative research using an instrumental case study of the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq in 2003. The basis of this research was to provide insight and facilitate

understanding into what politicization looks like and the role politicization had on intelligence. The method of study was causative, in order to find the effects (if any) politicization has on various entities: the government, public, intelligence community, etc. Significantly, Hasted, who holds a PhD in political science has stated “ politicizing an issue is not by definition corrupting it” (2013, 10) nonetheless, also paramount is acknowledging the negative connotations of politicization, especially in the intelligence-policy process perspective.

The purpose of this study is to conduct research using existed published literature to help identify how intelligence become politicized; an issue which governs decisions by policymakers and intelligence officers alike. The focus will be on criteria reasons for why politicization occurs, specifically in the intelligence community and what key factors contribute to the politicization of intelligence. Criteria of this method will include credibility through research of qualified experts outlined in peer reviewed journals, relating to the topic of politicization. Dependability is another criteria within this method, knowing there will be differences on how politicization is viewed and defined, which can affect the way the research is then approached. Also, confirmability will allow for different methods to confirm theories or contradict the prior hypothesis through research; this will allow for identification of possible bias or distortion in thought.

I chose this specific case study because of its popularity in terms the being a historical event relating to politicization, as noted in numerous literature, despite various opinions on how exactly the intelligence was politicized. Due to limited time constraints, research of data was strictly literature based,

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through document analysis of various textbooks, online resources of scholarly reviews and published intelligence reports. Through document analysis, I tested my hypothesis of how intelligence, when driven by political agenda, is subject to politicization; as a result, intelligence (relating to the presence of WMDs) was undermined in efficiency and accuracy by policymakers. Questions which I asked to help guide my research was initially, what politicization was, since multiple sources such as Eisenfeld and Hastedt noted politicization was a result of personal proximity of intelligence advisers to policymakers, or intelligence organizations' proximity to or dependence on politicians. However, Roger Zane George (2013, 153) noted blame for politicization is "more squarely on policymakers than on intelligence professionals" supported by Rovner's (2011, 261) claim "domestic politics is what drives policymakers to "oversell" policies and thereby find themselves forced to misuse and sometimes compel the intelligence community to alter its judgments." As a result, this led me to focus on the various theories of proximity or politics as to what really was the root cause of politicization.

Analysis and Findings

Nada Bakos, ironically a writer for think tank Foreign Policy Research Institute feels "some degree of politicization is normal and to be expected." However, Bakos was also a former analyst at the CIA leading up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and mirrored other analysts who found no ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. Bakos (as an analyst) felt the politicization effects when policymakers starting asking analysts to find the ties. As a result, Bakos (2017) felt "the information is supposed to lead the

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policymaker, not the other way around. Intelligence crafted at the hands of professionals is intended to inform policymakers' decisions. However, if policies are used as a yardstick for analysts to then find matching intelligence, that is politicization."

Research has shown politicization in intelligence, is to some degree inevitable (Betts 2007; Eisenfeld 2016; Hastedt 2013; Jervis 2010; Pillar 2011 and Rovner 2011). Through further examination, research highlights four of Treverton (2009) and Bruce et. al's (2008) five indicators associated with politicization. These included direct pressure (Hastedt 2013; Eisenfeld 2016; Pillar 2011); cherry picking (Marrin 2013; Pillar 2011) question-asking (Pillar 2011; Rovner 2011), and shared mindset (Betts 2007 and Pillar 2011). Also, to note is when politicization occurs, it doesn't have to be only one of the five indicators, conversely "several forms can be at work at once" (Bruce, George and Georgetown University 2008, 93), as shown prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the question asking, cherry picking, and direct pressure by policymakers.

Lacking from the research was indications of house line, which may be a result from research of various authors, whom the majority of are professors of political science relating to national security and/or have worked within an intelligence agency. As a result of the sources who provided information about politicization, this could have created a biased approach how politicization is viewed. Had the research been conducted to study the experiences of politicization from the policymaker's perception, this could have produced further information about how house line affects intelligence, from the political point of view. Further research into various other work,

with a focus on information provided by people who work in the political arena, specifically political activists or policy makers may shed some light on how house line is incorporated into the politicization of intelligence.

However, focusing on the information provided through the research highlights an already known (and long withstanding) problem between the two worlds of intelligence and politics. Moreover, many have identified this as a natural occurrence, although many have not highlighted the positive side of politicization. Although there are procedures in place for analysts to provide feedback if the feeling of being politicized was happening in the workplace, however, it appears through research the issue is not going away any time soon, and if it is not caught early enough, politicization can affect not only public interests, but appear to question the work of intelligence agencies across the board as it has in the case study of this research paper. Since politicization has been around for decades and has no signs of going away, the results from this research paper will probably not influence policy decisions, if anything just highlight the role policy plays when it comes to intelligence being politicized. Furthermore, the results from this paper will most likely not influence any programs, methods or forms of intervention. There is the call for Analysts are warned to be wary of any indicators which could potentially prove to be politicized activities from policymakers, but it appears as though the relationship between analyst and policymaker needs to exists in order to effectively communicate both ways. This research has identified the various forms of politicization and how it affects intelligence and the public perception of intelligence. Information derived from this research won't necessarily improve or change the existence of politicization within the intelligence community, it only highlights the presence of it and

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how to identify what it looks like in order to avoid it corrupting intelligence altogether.

Conclusion

As a final point, politicization is hard to define, difficult to prove by the IC, and not openly admitted to being done by policymakers. Research was conducted in hopes to discover how intelligence becomes politicized, as a result there are links between intelligence failures as a result of politicization and hasty policy decisions by policymakers'. All of my qualitative research was literature based, including the use of an instrumental case study of the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. To ensure the reliability of the information, verifying reputable sources who provided insight to what politicization can do to intelligence, and the public's perception of intelligence. Research has supported my hypothesis of how the moment policy drives intelligence, as well as altering the perception of intelligence, is the moment policymakers have politicized intelligence. As a result, the effects of this phenomena had created one of the most recent intelligence blunders, to the intelligence community who did not prevent the politicization; the public's perception of what the intelligence community didn't know once WMDs were never found. Lacking from research was acknowledgement from policymakers who decided to push political agenda under the guise of intelligence. Research has also shown the various issues an analyst must face when working with policymakers; the fine line between keeping a relationship with those policymakers while ensuring personal biases and political pressure do not take over the analytical process and skew intelligence overall.

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