Cultural Bias in Intelligence Failure: The 1973 Arab-Israeli War
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Introduction

The United States has been surprised by events such as the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The October War of 1973 was yet another surprise to American policymakers, in which Egyptian and Syrian forces jointly attacked on Israel on the holy day of Yom Kippur. The inability to foresee the Arab attack was a failure in intelligence gathering and analysis d to consider all facets of the situation, from both Western and non-Western Arab perspectives.

In this paper, we argue that a closer analysis of cultural factors is essential to good intelligence gathering, analysis, and successful policymaking. While in the past, cultural analysis has played a peripheral role in decision-making, it should occupy a more central role, since it provides insights that can be recognized and explained only by cultural factors.

Roadmap

Our paper concentrates on the cultural bias[1] throughout American views of Egypt. Consequently, the initial section of the paper addresses the capacity of bias to blind intelligence analysts and policymakers in the process of strategic decision-making. This section is followed by a discussion of specific biases relevant to the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Next, we rely on particular insights drawn from Johnson and Berrett's *Cultural Topography: A New Research Tool for Intelligence Analysis*, which provides a thorough "toolkit" for analyzing intelligence with respect to culture. By comparing what occurred with what *could have* occurred if the

[1] See Appendix 1: Key Terms

"toolkit" had been implemented, we can show that cultural analysis would have been useful

before the 1973 War in preventing biased assumptions and false judgments about Egyptian

intentions.

Bias and Its Effects

The discussion of bias in strategic decision-making is relevant because biases are

inevitable, for the simple reason that humans are innately biased creatures. The problem is not

only that we generate beliefs based on our personal environments; but also that we use these

beliefs in our interpretation of events. In this way, bias can be blinding: it inhibits our ability to

conceptualize a situation in a truly comprehensive way. Although biases are inevitable to a

certain extent, they are not completely uncontrollable. We propose that greater attention needs to

be given to this issue in order to develop a multi-angle and methodological approach to reduce

the blinding effects of cultural bias in intelligence analysis and policymaking.

Bias can be especially detrimental to intelligence analysis, since its purpose is to present

impartial information to policymakers. However, bias also threatens the policymaker's ability to

interpret an event accurately in order to design and execute a plan of action.

To understand how cultural bias can be broken down by the "toolkit," one must take a

look at how it can be generated in the first place. Based on conclusions drawn by various

strategic management researchers, Charles Schwenk provides several explanations for the ways

in which bias can translate to decision-making, two of which are important to this paper. The

first, "selective perception," is what Schwenk refers to as "cognitive simplification": decision-

makers "must construct simplified mental models when dealing with complex problems.[2]

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[2] Schwenk, Charles R. "The Cognitive Perspective on Strategic Decision Making." *Journal of Management Studies*, 1988: 43.

Selective perception may result because decision-makers do not assess a particular situation in an all-inclusive way.

Second, what Schwenk refers to as "the illusion of control," describes a specific kind of bias that has the capacity to affect strategic decision-making. This kind of bias skews an individual's perception of personal success, leading him to expect a degree of success higher than what "the objective probability would warrant."[3] The illusion of control is often enhanced by the "way we collect information": we are inclined to seek out information that supports our beliefs in an effort to control outcomes.[4]

Therefore, both "selective perception" and the "illusion of control" are biases that affect strategic decision-making because they restrict the range of potential strategic alternatives and limit the scope of evaluation. In the context of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, we see these biases in effect. For instance, even though Israeli intelligence had successfully identified most of the Arab war preparations prior to 6 October, American and Israeli policymakers still did not anticipate that an Arab attack on Israel was imminent. The illusion of control over the situation led American and Israeli policymakers to overlook the threat of the Arab attack; their assessment of military capacity firmly dictated that the Arab soldier"lack[ed] the necessary physical and cultural qualities for performing effective military services."[5] In addition, selective perception facilitated the miscalculation of logical options on the part of American and Israeli policymakers: they "mistook their own analysis of logical options for the actual range of options."[6] In this way, the evaluation of the likelihood of Arab attack was based solely on the American and Israeli constructs of logical analysis, which unfortunately, differed greatly from reality.

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[3] Schwenk, p. 44.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Betts, Richard K. *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1982: 71.
[6] Betts, p. 70.

In sum, in the case of the intelligence failure of the 1973 War, selective perception and the illusion of control were products of American and Israeli cultural bias. An effort to incorporate cultural understanding into the process of intelligence gathering and decision-making would have prevented the creation of a cultural prism that restricted one's ability to see beyond the constructs of one's own society.

Specific Biases

Cognitive gaps in analysis can be explained by two underlying misconceptions: 1) differing views of the rationale for going to war; and 2) the notion of Arabs as culturally and militarily inferior to Israelis and Americans.

In part, strategic culture bias[7] generated a gap in the analysis of logical warfare options by creating a perceptual lens[8]. The American concept of "strategic premises smothered tactical indicators."[9] In other words, American and Israeli officials acted on the basis of preconceptions of what the Arabs needed to launch a successful military attack against Israel, blinding them to Egyptian preparations for war. Despite access to Egypt's war plan, the American and Israeli emphasis on strategic planning as the basis of rationale for conducting warfare led them to believe that Egypt would not attack in the specified timeframe. For instance, the 11 May 1973 CIA document *Middle East* states:

> . . . there is no conclusive evidence that Sadat has made a decision to attack. Both Sadat and his advisers are aware that their military prospects are poor at best; a fresh disaster might well sweep away Sadat and his regime. His military preparations are not, in any case, complete, and he has not exhausted his political options.[10]

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[7] See Appendix I: Key Terms.
[8] See Appendix I: Key Terms.
[9] Betts, p. 69.
[10] Betts, p. 70.

This demonstrates that the American assessments of Sadat's options were based on the rationale that adequate military capability was a necessary precondition to war. Egyptian ideological and psychological factors were not included in this reasoning.

The underlying issue was the incorrect assumption that Arab military actions were dependent upon Realpolitik, and according to American policymakers, "realism offered the Arabs no viable military option."[11] American officials failed to acknowledge that Arabs might conceptualize warfare as contingent upon a range of factors other than military calculations or Realpolitik. Strategic culture bias, therefore, blinded American intelligence analysts and policymakers from considering other motivations for war. This kind of cultural bias made certain alternative motivations inconceivable to American officials; the idea that Arab actions could be based on a perceived threat to Arab identity,[12] for example, or rather, based on a motivation to preserve Arab honor and values[13] were beyond the scope of American and Israeli logical analysis.

The second cognitive gap in analysis was based on the ethnocentric belief that Arabs were inferior to Israelis, both militarily and culturally. The Egyptian military failure in the 1967 Six-Day War "instilled a stereotype of Arab soldiers as primitive, undisciplined, and incapable of handling sophisticated equipment or conducting coordinated operations."[14] In a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting held on 7 October, the day after the war began, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger reported to the group that "the Israelis say the Syrians are doing better—that they're not acting like Arabs."[15] Later in the conversation, he responded to Henry

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[11] Betts, p. 70.
[12] See Appendix I: Key Terms.
[13] See Appendix I: Key Terms.
[14] Betts, p. 70.
[15] WSAG. *Washington Special Action Group Meeting.* Meeting Minutes, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1973.

Kissinger's comment by saying: "you're being logical. You can't ascribe that kind of logic to them." These comments, as inconsequential as they may seem, reveal a great deal about American bias towards the Arabs in the context of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Not only did the US Secretary of Defense blatantly describe 'them' as illogical, he also suggested that 'acting like Arabs' implied military incompetence. The belief that Arabs were inherently inferior contributed significantly to the failure to anticipate the Egyptian attack on 6 October.

American intelligence analysts and policymakers cannot always assume that they fully understand how other governments rationalize going to war. Egypt's attack on Israel in 1973 demonstrates that war can be prompted by a number of factors, including ideological and psychological variables. However, a greater understanding of culture can open these alternative considerations to American intelligence analysts and policymakers. This makes for a more effective process of analysis, which can positively affect decision-making because it breaks down the barriers of ethnocentric thought.

A Cultural Toolkit

Based on a method for training intelligence analysts in cultural topography by Jeannie Johnson and Matthew Berrett and a review of Israeli foreign policy by Michael Brecher, we created a "toolkit" that details the steps intelligence analysts could take to understand culture better in predicting the outcomes of the situations they study. By using the toolkit to analyze CIA documents associated with the 1973 war, we will also determine as to whether cultural analysis could have been applied to intelligence gathered before the war and whether it would have led to more accurate predictions. We argue that properly applying cultural analysis could have helped to prevent bias and in turn, created more accurate predictions.

The toolkit contains six steps that build upon one another to transform the perceptive lens

of the analyst. The typical intelligence analyst is not trained in cultural topography or cultural studies and so carries the prejudices of his society and working environment. These prejudices are most often so subconscious that the analyst may actually attempt to interpret the subject from the other perspective, only to end up embedding prejudices into that new "understanding." In other words, the analyst puts himself in the shoes of a subject to understand a situation better but instead of applying the subject's logic to that situation, he applies his own.[16] By using our toolkit to understand the perspectives of his subjects better, the analyst can successfully view a situation from their perspectives and in turn, better analyze possible outcomes.

The first step of the toolkit is to focus on the area in question. In the case of the 1973 October War, one of the analysts' questions was whether it was possible for Egypt to go to war with Israel. Instead of simply sifting through data, analysts should have instead looked for specific signals to answer their question. By narrowing the scope of the question, analysts could have better focused on finding the core answer. For example, analysts could have examined the role of international powers within negotiation. Instead of looking broadly at topics such as the United States' interests and influence within its roles as an international power in the Middle East, analysts should have focused on specific questions such as "can Egypt alter its global standing without relying directly on the major powers?" By examining this specific question, analysts could have better revealed Egypt's options. In addition, they could have better differentiated signals from noise within data when they were not examining a broad area. Most often, analysts already had a preconceived (likely subconscious) idea of the answer to the proposed question. As training progresses, it is important for the analyst to take note of any preconceived notions before the cultural analysis begins. By doing so, analysts will not only

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[16] Berrett, Matthew, and Jeannie Johnson. "Cultural Topography: A New Research Tool for Intelligence Analysis." *Central for the Study of Intelligence*, 2011: 1-22.

develop greater accuracy; they will also combat their own barriers to effective cultural analysis.

The second step focuses on the essential actors and their influences on the situation at hand. The analysts focus on a specific group within the society. During the war, this step would have instructed analysts to examine the key Egyptian political decision makers. The analysts then should analyze in-depth one key actor to discern his specific influence on the situation. In the case of the 1973 War, this actor would most often be President Sadat. The question analysts would have asked would have been whether it made sense for these leaders, specifically President Sadat, to go to war. It is important to note that while the toolkit will later focus on the social influences affecting these leaders' decisions, this step focuses purely on the leaders themselves and their possible motives. Most often, there is a large range of possible motivations for a leader within a society: retaining power, granting favorable positions to those close to him, ensuring capacity to run society, retaining personal standing and pride, national and personal economic limitations and goals, and other obligations or desires. This step would have been critical to analysis during the period leading up to the 1973 War. Taking into account top Arab leaders' motives would have expanded the breadth and understanding of analysts and policymakers. Now it is widely recognized that the Israelis and Americans misunderstood and underestimated Sadat. For example, in the Agranat Report, Israel admits that it treated Egypt under Sadat as if nothing had changed from when Nasser was in power.[17] The misinterpretation of the situation and individual players greatly hurt overall intelligence analysis.

The third step looks more closely at what motivated these leaders to make certain decisions. In order to find these influences, analysts must study the particular society in question with regards to its history, ideology, and tradition. Cultural influences can be as specific as the

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[17] National Commiession of Inquiry, Agranat Commission. "Agranat Report." 1974.

ideological basis of a party or group or as wide as national, religious, or socio-economic influences. Influences can also be present in the form of pressures from entities such as members of the actors' communities or public opinion as whole. Finally, a major influence can be the past and how it lays out the situation in the present. Egypt, and the Arab world as a whole, had largely failed in past confrontations with Israel. This would have greatly influenced President Sadat's tactics and his need to take an "unexpected" approach to the situation. These factors essentially create an "attitudinal prism," which derives from the environment that the decision-maker is in and the personal traits that the decision-maker possesses. This also includes how these leaders perceive the state's standing and prestige in terms of its place within global systems. Each elite member or leader in society has his own perceptions of the environment and the state's role in that environment. The place that a state holds within its environment in relation to the values and desires of its population and leaders can directly lead to motivations for actions such as war or diplomacy.[18] By examining the effects these entities have on an actor's motivations and subsequently how these motivations affect actions, analysts can better think in the place of the subject they are analyzing and make more accurate predictions.

Steps two and three are then integrated in step four, which examines how the actors, as well as the individuals within their society, view themselves as a result of these influences and how this in turn affects the leaders' perceptions of the situation and their possible decisions. This is done by examining the norms, values, and identity of the society and using these to formulate the perceptual lens of the decision-makers themselves. Norms are the ways in which actors are expected to act as a result of their culture and environment, values are ideals or tangible entities that are viewed with high regard in society, and identity is the way in which an actor or group

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[18] Brecher, Michael. *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.

views itself. In essence, the question that analysts look to answer is what these social norms and values tell us about these individuals' personal identities. In turn, how does this identity affect how the decision makers view their situation? When analysts use this step, it is essential to remember that "decision makers act in accordance with their perceptions of reality" and not necessarily the objective facts about the nation.[19]

This step is particularly important in differentiating between an American or Israeli perspective of the situation and an Arab perspective. Most Arabs valued restoring their honor and standing nearly as much as winning the war and actually acquiring territory. Both sides had very different ideas of the goals to be achieved by the use of force. For the Arabs, the purpose of the war was to shake Israel's perceived invincibility and to gain military prestige and recognition. Americans and Israeli decision makers and intelligence analysts believed that if the Arabs went to war, it could only be to achieve a complete restructuring of the borders. These two perceptions of "victory" also widened the gap between the understanding of what was "logical" on either side: Americans and Israelis would have viewed going to war as logical only if there was a possibility of total success, while Arabs would have viewed a limited attack as logical – even with only limited success as long as there was a chance of shocking the Israelis and Americans into settlement negotiations or recovering Egypt's prestige and honor. These two widely different perceptions of this key factor, as well as a Western inability to perceive the Arab logic, led to inaccurate analysis and predictions of Arab actions.

Once one has established this perceptual lens in step four, one can use it in step five to reexamine the options of the leaders in question. This new perceptual lens allows the analysts to find critical information within the data that may have been missed or misinterpreted when a different perceptual lens was in place.

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[19] Ibid.

Finally, we reexamine our initial question in step six: is it possible that the Egyptians and Syrians may decide to go to war against Israel? In comparison to when first looking at this question, the analyst would now have a better understanding of the cultural influences within this decision. It is less likely that the analyst would fall into the traps of ethnocentrism by unknowingly applying his own bias in estimating the perceptions of others, and so would develop a more accurate array of options for the actor(s) in question.

Application of toolkit to document 1973-05-17

By applying the toolkit to the CIA National Intelligence Estimate "Possible Egyptian Hostilities: Determinants and Implications we can hypothesize that a greater understanding of culture on part of the analysts could have led to more accurate predictions of the actors and situation.

As we begin examining this document through the toolkit, we need to decide first on the precise question that we want to answer. While the intelligence analysts appear to have looked very broadly at Egypt's possible motivations to go to war—what circumstances could further pressure Egypt to war, and how various international actors were involved—the toolkit would direct this analysis to one specific question: what factors will push Sadat to go to war? Although this document contained many accurate assessments of the pressures on the Egyptian leadership and its possible motivations, it failed to draw a decisive or connected conclusion from the individual predictions. In part this was a result of a lack of focus on what precisely was being analyzed, which in turn led to an erroneous analysis. By bringing analysis of various cultural factors together, in tandem with the "typical" factors in analysis, to answer one specific question, we could better predict whether President Sadat would decide to engage in hostilities with Israel

and at what point he might decide to do so.

We must then look specifically at President Sadat's personal motivations in step two of the analytical toolkit. In this document, the CIA analysts make several assumptions regarding Sadat that appear based more on their own cultural opinions than basic Arab cultural realities. Although several of their statements are accurate, the analysts' evident ethnocentric viewpoints decrease the accuracy of their perception of President Sadat as a whole. The analysts make five main assumptions when first looking at Sadat: he believes that he must act in some way, he is not committed to military action, he is aware of Arab inferiority and Egypt's need for American pressure on Israel, he recognizes that he personally could not survive another defeat by Israel, and he "wants a controlled crisis." While their conclusions that Sadat knows he must act and that he wants a controlled crisis are generally accurate, all of these statements fail to see Sadat in relation to his place in history. In these statements and in the document as a whole, the analysts appear to view Sadat as if he had inherited the popular domestic base given to Nasser. In reality, President Sadat very much needed to earn his domestic support. Although he did attempt Egyptian economic liberalization and development in order to gain support, he still needed to decrease greatly the evident "Nasserism" in Egypt and rapidly gain domestic support. To do this, he needed to rely on immediate action in foreign affairs.[20] In the statements on Sadat's lack of commitment to military action and his recognition that Egypt could not survive a defeat against Israel, the analysts fail to recognize that Sadat needed to take radical international action to earn domestic support. In addition, the statement on Sadat's need for the United States to pressure Israel and his acknowledgment of Arab inferiority indicates that the analysts directly viewed Sadat's personal motivation through their own perceptual lens. While Sadat may have personally

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[20] Ryan, Curtis R. "Political Strategies and Regime Survival in Egypt." *Journal of Third World Studies*, 2001: 25-46.

acknowledged this "reality," publicly recognizing it or showing Egyptians that he believed it would have done nothing to enhance his own power. In these statements, the analysts also fail to recognize Sadat and Egypt's cultural pride. Although the influence of past events will be specifically examined in step three, step two should look at President Sadat in relation to his place in history.

After examining President Sadat's basic personal motivations to go to war, we then turn to step three of the toolkit to examine the Egyptian and Arab societal influences on Sadat. One of the primary influences on President Sadat noted in this document is Egyptian failure in past relations with Israel. Analysts recognize that the past failures of the war of attrition and diplomacy as a whole had led to a shift in Egyptian tactics towards specifically pressuring the Soviet Union and United States. While this assessment is accurate, it fails to recognize that pressuring the US and Soviet Union would largely include Egyptian tactics that were not diplomatic or "minor" in nature, as similar tactics had already been attempted—in diplomacy with Israel and the war of attrition—and had failed. Egypt's past was a major pressure point pushing the nation to engage in hostilities with Israel, as Egypt had already exhausted nearly every other option.

The document also recognizes that President Sadat was under intense pressure to make progress in regaining lost territory and that "to do nothing is to perpetuate an intolerable situation." The analysts even see that an atmosphere of crisis or lack of international action favorable to Egypt may push Sadat to engage in hostilities in order to keep his regime intact and hold on to power. However, they again retreat by stating that Sadat could simply cite diplomacy as his "evidence of progress towards gaining lost territory." This statement fails to recognize the importance of political, cultural, and historical pressures on Sadat. Egyptian diplomacy with

Israel had not been truly successful in the past. In addition, the Egyptian political atmosphere at that time was pushing for action beyond what had already been attempted. As diplomacy and tactics such as the war of attrition had already been attempted, it follows that President Sadat would have been pressured to attempt a new, much more radical approach. Finally, the Arab and Egyptian culture would have seen diplomacy at this point as essentially a waste of time rather than a move towards regaining territory, as they had not yet regained their honor or standing in relations with the US and Israel. While the CIA analysts make many accurate observations within this document, they fail to accurately assess the social pressures on President Sadat.

This leads us to step four where the analysts should have looked at these influences and their effect on President Sadat in order to formulate the perceptive lens of President Sadat and Egypt as a whole. By looking at Egyptian norms, values, and identity, the analysts could have better seen Egyptian options as viewed by Egyptians rather than as viewed by Americans. Although analysts met at least parts of the earlier steps, there is no evidence that any part of step four was ever applied in this document. Throughout the document, the analysts cite Egyptian victory as only two things: regaining vast amounts of territory themselves or getting the US or USSR to gain vast amounts of territory for them. However, when one looks at true Egyptian and Arab values, the emphasis actually lies more on rebuilding honor and standing than conquering land. This has been shown throughout Arab military history. The 1967 Six Day War, Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran, and his subsequent challenge to the United States are only a few examples of the Arab tendency to take pride and honor before a "realistic" view of victory. This leads Arab nations to attack countries much stronger or more powerful because they believe it will give them greater standing. Survival was essentially viewed as a victory as the Arab nations

managed to fight an opponent much stronger and even succeeded in inflicting damage.[21] In addition, although Egyptians may have viewed themselves as having lesser military strength than the US or large Western powers, they certainly did not view themselves as inherently inferior militarily. This was shown when the war began and the Egyptians strategically outsmarted the Israelis. While the US perceptual lens focused on Egypt as incapable of action and "victory" due to its perceived military weakness and infeasibility of permanently gaining Israeli territory, the Egyptians viewed themselves as a much greater strategic military force, particularly in terms of the actual "victory" they wanted to accomplish.

In step five, we can take this new perceptual lens that is equipped with an accurate view of Egypt's military strength (in relation to the nation's perception of victory and its own capability) to reexamine President Sadat's political options. While the analysts' prediction that President Sadat would wait until after the United Nations Security Council debates and the Nixon-Brezhnev Summit in June to take military action proved to be accurate, they likely erred in the assumption that President Sadat was not preparing for hostilities with Israel. The CIA analysts essentially saw President Sadat's only option as diplomacy with the US and Russia. They also note that the only possible outcome of Egyptian hostilities with Israel is the shattering of Egyptian forces and the elimination of any prospective Arab-Israeli peace settlement. They state, "If Egypt decides to initiate hostilities, it will do so in spite of military consequences, rather than in hope of military gains." This is an accurate assessment on the surface when military gains are defined as directly acquiring and holding territory. However, this outlook fails to see the political strategy involved in Egyptian military action. Through our new perceptual lens, which recognizes Egyptian strategic culture and the social and cultural influences on Sadat, we can see that Egypt viewed achieving higher standing rather than a pure military victory as a

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[21] Ibid.

military and political gain. This in turn shows that military action against Israel was a viable Egyptian option.

In step six, the conclusions that the CIA analysts originally develop that Egypt would be pushed to war if the diplomatic stalemate continues and that the Egyptians believe hostilities would force the US to pressure Israel as a result of anti-US action by the Saudis and other oil producers. While these predictions are quite accurate, the analysts then imbue the actual analysis within the document with a degree of ethnocentrism that essentially reverse their accurate predictions. Their faith in Egyptian reliance of "the Great Powers" and Sadat's recognition of "Arab military weakness" essentially leads them to negate any idea that Egypt could act on its own to force the international community to action. In reality, as was made quite clear in step five, Egypt viewed its position within a strategic and social culture that was very different from the one the analysts perceived. As Sadat believed that he needed only to raise Egypt's standing and decrease Israel's confidence in order to be more successful in negotiations, military action should have been seen as a very plausible—if not favorable—option. Instead of looking at Egyptian hostilities as a last possible option that Egypt would be driven to only in desperation, analysts should have seen it as a viable option that Egypt was likely to pursue in the near future.

Although the intelligence analysts originally drew many accurate assessments of the situation in Egypt, their lack of cultural understanding of the key actors and of Egyptian society as a whole hurt the accuracy of their predictions. By comparing what analysts could have achieved if a cultural analytical toolkit had been applied to what was achieved with the analysts' basic knowledge, we have shown that including culture in intelligence analysis is necessary to formulate accurate predictions.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that culture should be a major consideration in the process of intelligence gathering, analysis, and policymaking. We explained the theory behind how cultural misunderstanding contributes to failure in predicting the outcome of situations in intelligence analysis. We then demonstrated that there was major cultural misunderstanding and bias specifically within the CIA and other American intelligence documents. Finally, by implementing a toolkit that effectively used culture in intelligence analysis, we illustrated that a greater accuracy in predicting possible Arab actions and motives during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war could be achieved.

Cultural analysis should not be seen solely as a missed opportunity to predict Egyptian action in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War; instead, it should become a standard element of U.S. intelligence analysis and policymaking in all foreign affairs. It has the potential to decrease the likelihood of surprise in foreign policy, and thus could create greater stability and security for the US.

Appendix I: Key Terms

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is essentially the belief in the superiority of the values of one's own ethnic group. It can also be applied when analysts try to put themselves in the "shoes" of the foreigner and incidentally apply their own cultural logic to the perceived situation.

Values/Norms

Values are ideals or intangible entities that are viewed with high regard in society. They often give higher status to members of society and are honored by most individuals. Values often

shape or cause the motives and decisions of actors. Norms refer to the ways in which actors are expected to act as a result of their culture and environment.

Identity

Identity is the way in which an actor or group views itself. This includes self-perceived characteristics, the reputation it strives for, and the roles or status it delegates to members of the group. The conflict between the identity a group gives itself and the identity it is given by others is often the root of cultural misinterpretation in analysis.

Perceptual Lens

Perceptual lens is the cultural filter that affects how actors determine facts about other actors and situations. Decision makers often act as a result of their perceptions of reality. The way individuals perceive their environment often means that problems or facts are not viewed objectively.

Norms

Norms are the ways in which actors are expected to act as a result of their culture and environment.

Signals and Noise

Signals are key pieces of evidence that allow intelligence analysts and policy-makers to anticipate events that might occur in the future.

Noise, on the other hand, refers to useless intelligence - intelligence that cannot be used to warn of imminent danger. Noise competes with signals as they simultaneously flow into the state, making it difficult for intelligence analysts to differentiate between the two. This has the potential to affect policy-making in a significant way.

Strategic Culture

Strategic Culture refers to a shared set of beliefs, preferences, and priorities regarding security and war that influences the strategic decisions that individuals make in order to meet political ends. These strategic preferences are often rooted in a state's former military experience, and shaped to a certain extent by economic, political, social, cultural, and philosophical factors specific to the state. This term is described as 'culture', and not simply as 'policy', because culture implies a degree of perpetuity that policy lacks.

Cultural Bias

Cultural bias can occur in two ways. In reference to intelligence analysis, cultural bias arises when a thorough examination of culture is not included in the approach to analysis. This lack of recognition of the significance of culture for policy-making can be attributed to a general tendency on the part of intelligence analysts to focus on power and wealth as primary elements that drive decision-making, rather than culture. Cultural bias can also be prompted by ethnocentrism, creating a cultural prism that limits perception and understanding.