

**Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence and National Security
Myths, Fears, and Expectations**
Thomas Fingar

Introduction

Thank you for coming. I am honored and humbled by the opportunity to speak to you this evening as the Payne Distinguished Lecturer and deeply grateful to the family of Frank and Arthur Payne for their generous support to FSI. The significance of this honor was underscored a few weeks ago when a former Payne Lecturer stopped by my office to wish me well and to suggest ways in which we might work together. That predecessor was Alejandro Toledo, a Stanford graduate who also happens to be the former president of Peru. Alejandro's implication that the Payne Lectureship had made us peers was more flattering to me than to him. Indeed, it caused me to recall another case in which I was mismatched. In the early 1980s, I was the American co-chair of a US-China energy policy project. My counterpart for a time was Li Peng, who later became Premier of China. I didn't rise as high in our government, but Li has never been the Payne Distinguished Lecturer.

I am also grateful to Chip Blacker for giving me the opportunity to analyze and articulate what I learned during 38 years in the US Intelligence Community. Our goals for doing so are to provide experience-based recommendations to improve national security procedures, to inspire students and train the next generation of public servants, and to enhance public understanding of the intelligence enterprise. This lecture, and those that follow, will use examples and experience-based introspection to describe and demystify the roles, capabilities, and challenges of your Intelligence Community.

Let me begin by asking a question: "How many of you collect or analyze intelligence? Not many. How many of you interpreted the question as "Who here is a spy?" What if I ask the question somewhat differently? "How many of you check the thermometer before deciding what to wear? How many tune in to traffic reports before deciding what route to take during rush hour? Who checks the newspaper to find out what movies are playing and when they start before heading to the theater? The answer, of course, is that we all do these things. We do them—as we do many other things—to inform our decisions and to make better choices. We collect and analyze information in order to reduce uncertainty and make better-informed decisions. That, in a nutshell, is what intelligence is all about. The world's "second oldest profession" and our multi-billion dollar intelligence budget exist to reduce uncertainty and inform decisions, especially those related to the security of our nation and the safety of our citizens.

Scope and Stakes

The questions I posed a moment ago were intended to demonstrate that we all collect, analyze, and use intelligence. If you are uncomfortable using the word "intelligence," you can substitute "information," but that does not change the purpose or the process.

Pro football teams, venture capitalists, epidemiologists, and many others routinely collect, analyze, and apply intelligence in order to increase the likelihood of success in whatever they are trying to accomplish. All such examples have much in common with the Intelligence Community, but there also are important differences of scope, expectations, and impact. On the latter point, I have told hundreds of new analysts that it is both sobering and essential to remember that the United States might act or refrain from taking action because of what we say or write. From my vantage point, much of what is written about the Intelligence Community fails to recognize the similarities or to understand the impact of the differences. As a result, the Intelligence Community is treated as more *sui generis* than it is, and most proposals to make it better are not very helpful.

Omniscient and Incompetent

Movies, spy novels, and the news media have shaped perceptions of Intelligence Community capabilities and competence. As a result, most of what you think you know about intelligence is probably wrong. Elements of the prevailing caricature can be summarized as follows: the Intelligence Community is comprised mainly of secret agents and computer geeks who know everything about everywhere all the time but are so incompetent that they cannot “connect the dots” despite huge budgets and reckless disregard for our civil liberties. Does that sound about right? Well, the description of the caricature may be fairly accurate, but the caricature itself is not. During the next several minutes, I want to debunk the mythology in order to highlight the challenges we face and the capabilities we use to reduce uncertainty.

Let me turn first to the question of whether we do, can, or should know “everything” that happens or will happen, anywhere in the world, all the time. Movies depicting “spy agency” video of truck movements and terrorist camps in North Africa or South Asia used to be pure fiction but reality is catching up with artistic license. Indeed, the use of video has become an essential element of force protection in Iraq. But we cannot photograph everywhere all the time and, even if we could, there would never be enough imagery analysts to make sense of what we had. Having a picture is not the same as knowing the significance of what you can see. Two illustrations will clarify what I mean.

Until we mandated changes in tradecraft and procedure a few years ago, it was common for analytic reports to contain statements such as, “According to imagery, North Korea shipped missiles to Syria.” Such statements were misleadingly definitive. The imagery cited might show a wooden crate sitting on the dock of an identified port. A picture might be worth a thousand words, but a photo of a box on a dock doesn’t tell you what is in the box or where it came from. Judgments about content, origin, and destination are based on information that clarifies the meaning of the image. In my experience, pictures seldom speak for themselves.

The second illustration is from the infamous Iraq Weapons of Mass Destruction National Intelligence Estimate produced in 2002. Judgments about chemical weapons were based, in part, on assertions by imagery analysts that a particular combination of vehicles was the “signature” for the movement of chemical munitions. Pictures clearly showed

canisters being moved, but the special truck in question was a water tanker—a fire truck—that was used for the transfer of munitions of all kinds. The chemical weapons analyst didn't know that and those using the imagery-derived judgments did not have visibility into the underlying logic and evidentiary chains. We have tried to correct that.

We can discuss these and other illustrations during the question and answer period but before shifting from imagery to communications intercepts, I want to underscore three points. The first is that our technical capabilities, though much less than imagined or imputed, are astonishing and increasing rapidly. The second is that collection is the easy part; interpreting what it means requires skilled analysts. We have more imagery—and other forms of intelligence—than we do analysts and we already collect more than we can process. This is important because, until the information is processed in the mind of an analyst, it is just data. Third, the more we are able to do with imagery and other technologies, the more we are asked and expected to be able to do, proving once again that no good deed goes unpunished.

A similar situation pertains with respect to signals intelligence. We have big ears and can pull in huge quantities of digital data. Much of it is freely available—radio and TV broadcasts and websites on the Internet, for example—and we make as much use as we can of publicly available information—called “open source Intelligence” in the jargon of Washington. The preferred option is—and should be—to use information that is accessible at minimal cost and no risk. On many subjects, there is no need to search beyond the troves of openly available information and it would be foolish to steal or buy what we can obtain for free. On other subjects, corroborating what is available in open sources with clandestinely acquired information is important to increase confidence in the accuracy and validity of the information. On a relatively small number of issues, however, such as terrorist plans, illicit transfers of biological agents, or black market arms sales, most of what we need to know can only be obtained using clandestine collection. As is the case with imagery, there are very exaggerated views of how much we collect and what we do with the information. Exaggeration is not limited to the movies or the media; for years the European Parliament has issued studies and warnings about US-led collection of voice and fax traffic that it calls “Echelon.” According to these “studies” the US and our partners collect virtually every phone call. We don't. Even if we could, we wouldn't want to. It would take tens of millions of analysts to process the data, yielding a result that would be mostly dross. Can you imagine spending your entire day listening to teenagers on their cell phones? We want to know the ultimate destination of terrorists who have completed their training in South Asia and departed for Europe or North America, not what one fifteen year old thinks about another's boyfriend.

Here, also, I would like to underscore three issues related to the collection and exploitation of voice and other forms of communication. The first is volume; even if it were possible to collect “everything,” it would make no sense to do so because we would be drowning in data, the vast majority of which would be completely irrelevant to any conceivable national security objective. The days of gathering up “everything we can” on the chance that the metaphorical drift net would pull in something of value are long gone. To give you a sense of why this is impractical, think about the challenges of

finding something of value in a potential cache of information that increases in volume equal to the holdings of all Stanford libraries every few hours. Gives the expression “drowning in data” a whole new meaning. The only sensible approach is to begin with a focused question and design collection strategies to answer the questions that promise to provide the greatest insight into specific policy concerns, be they diplomatic strategies, military intentions, or the capabilities of a new anti-tank gun.

The second issue concerns civil liberties and the right to privacy. I’m sure that many of you recall the almost daily press articles on so-called “warrant-less wiretaps” during much of 2007 and 2008. The underlying issue was a serious one, but it was grossly distorted in the partisan political arena. We can discuss it further if you wish, but the point I want to make here are that respect for our rights as Americans is both a personal concern for our intelligence professionals—we are Americans too—and the subject of strict legal and procedural regulation. Show a veteran foreign intelligence professional a report with the name of an American citizen or entity and he or she is likely to react as if it were radioactive; you can go to jail for spying on Americans. But clear and long established procedures for handling information on Americans were changed after 9/11 with the goal of breaking down barriers between law enforcement and foreign intelligence that had impeded detection of the 9/11 plot. It should come as no surprise to anyone that domestic law enforcement materials are loaded with information on Americans—how do you tell the police who to watch if you can’t provide a name? How can you check for links between domestic criminals and foreign organizations if you can’t share a name? The result was a real dilemma—or, more accurately, a series of dilemmas—for the Intelligence Community. To cite just one: was it better to err on the side of protecting the civil liberties of individual Americans or to lean forward in alerting officials to possible terrorist or other threats to the homeland? The “default setting” for most professionals was to err on the side of civil liberties, but doing so raised disturbing “what if” questions. Civil liberties protection officers and formal boards exist to ensure that fear and zeal do not erode the liberties our national security enterprise exists to protect and they do an excellent job. But this is not a simple challenge.

Intelligence “Failures”

I will shift gears now and take up the question of “intelligence failures.” One of the lessons I learned early on in Washington is that there are only two possibilities with respect to national security policy: “policy success” and “intelligence failure.” You will search for a long time to find a public statement describing what has happened as a policy failure that occurred despite an intelligence success. For those who want an example, I refer you to what happened after the release of Key Judgments from the November 2007 National Intelligence Estimate on Iran’s nuclear intentions and capabilities.

Policymakers sometimes make “bad” decisions, but they can always claim—and often do—that they made the bad decision because the blankety blank (fill in the explicative of your choice) Intelligence Community failed to anticipate, discover, interpret, and explain a situation adequately. This is obviously self-serving, but in some ways, the syllogism is true. If the Intelligence Community does not provide adequate warning, misses key developments, misinterprets the available information, and/or uses bad assumptions and

inappropriate analogies to close information gaps, it isn't providing the quality of support for which it was created and receives a great deal of taxpayer money. That intelligence misled policymakers is certainly the impression many have—and many others want you to have—of the relationship between the publication of the 2002 National Intelligence Estimate on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and the decision to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein. I have a different view, but my purpose in citing that Estimate here is to illustrate broader points about the relationship between intelligence judgments and national security decisions.

Intelligence and Policy Decisions

The first point I want to make in this context is that intelligence usually informs policy decisions and sometimes drives the decision making process but it does not and should not determine what is decided. This point warrants repetition: intelligence usually informs policy decisions and sometimes drives the decision making process but it does not and should not determine what is decided. By informs, I mean that intelligence is just one, and frequently only one of many, streams of input flowing to national security decision makers. Others include formal and informal input from Cabinet Members and NSC Staff, the media, lobbyists, old friends, foreign officials, powerful Members of Congress, and so on. Most of the time, the goal of the non-intelligence inputs is to argue for a particular decision or course of action, such as sending military assistance to Georgia after the August 2008 military clash with Russia, or mounting a public diplomacy campaign to discredit Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. At other times, it is to put pressure on the President and/or other senior officials to stop deliberating and “do something” to stop the killing in Darfur or human rights abuses in Burma.

Intelligence is not supposed to—and in my experience very seldom does—advocate specific courses of action. Its primary purpose is to provide information and insight that will enhance understanding of the core issue, how it relates to other matters, and possible consequences of alternative courses of action. Stated differently, the primary purpose of intelligence inputs into the decision making process is to reduce uncertainty, identify risks and opportunities, and, by doing so, deepen understanding so that those with policymaking responsibilities will make “better” decisions. Being better informed does not guarantee better decisions, but being ill-informed or misinformed certainly reduces the likelihood of policy success.

Sometimes intelligence drives as well as informs the decision making process. One way that it does so occurs when collectors discover—and analysts assess--something new that simply cannot be ignored. For example, I remember working very hard over a weekend in 1988 after we determined on a Friday that China had delivered CSS-2 missiles to Saudi Arabia. Among the reasons for the crash analysis was the need to provide input to Secretary Schultz who was scheduled to meet with China's Foreign Minister the following Monday. The meeting had been scheduled for weeks to discuss other issues, but the new intelligence judgment put missiles on the agenda. The Intelligence Community wanted more time to figure out what had happened and why, but in such cases, no Administration official wants to explain to the Congress why the issue was not raised at the earliest opportunity. Potential or actual pressure from Congress is a subset

of a broader category of ways in which intelligence sometimes drives policy and presses officials to make decisions or take action. Another, and more infuriating, source of pressure is the leaking of intelligence information, usually in a way that overstates what is known, downplays or ignores different interpretations of what it means, and imputes a degree of reliability that may be completely unfounded.

The value of intelligence, and here I mean primarily analytic judgments on the reliability, meaning, and implications of information obtained from publicly available and clandestine sources, is a function of both the rigor of the analytic tradecraft employed, and the confidence officials have in the quality and objectivity of the judgments. Both dimensions are important because even high-quality assessments will have little impact if officials lack confidence in the Intelligence Community. I used the Iraq Estimate as a starting point for this discussion because when post-invasion searches failed to locate any weapons of mass destruction, Administration officials, Members of Congress, and career professionals in national security agencies lost confidence in the quality of work done by all analysts on all subjects, not just Iraqi WMD. Job One for me after I was named Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis in 2005 was to restore confidence in our work and our people. We succeeded. That is not just my assessment; it is what I was told directly by the President, our Congressional Oversight Committees, the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, and senior officials across the policy community.

Bounding—and Fulfilling—Expectations

The Intelligence Community is a can-do organization, but it cannot do everything. Over the course of the last twenty years, four phenomena or streams of developments have interacted in ways that have severely stressed the ability of the Community to provide the level and types of support required to satisfy escalating and expanding demands for information and insight. The first is the can-do attitude itself. Support to policymakers and military commanders has a very long history and is integral to both the ethos of the Community and the professionalism of its members. Individuals and each of the sixteen constituent agencies of the Intelligence Community play different roles, support different missions, and apply different types of expertise, but all are deeply committed to the security of our nation and the safety of our fellow citizens. Among other consequences, this predisposes all of them to accept and attempt to answer any question or request. There is great reluctance to dismiss requests for help on grounds that the subject is not an intelligence priority or is outside the bounds of traditional national security concerns, even if it requires information and expertise that the Intelligence Community does not have. This is laudable in many ways, but it is also hazardous and unsustainable.

The second stream of developments results from the escalation of requirements and demands assigned to or assumed by the Intelligence Community. As noted earlier, the post-Cold War era has seen dramatic changes in the scope of issues subsumed under the rubric of national security. In the much simpler—but more dangerous—days of the Cold War, “all” we had to worry about was the existential threat to our nation and our way of life posed by the Soviet Union and its allies. The target was big, slow moving, and predictable. Over the decades, we became very good at watching the Soviets (and they

became very good at watching us). We spent years developing capabilities to penetrate specific targets, acquired essential skills, and built up a large cadre of people with the linguistic, technical, political, and other areas of expertise needed to address a single, overriding threat. Almost everything else was relegated to secondary or lower priorities. This was well understood across the federal government and demands and expectations for the Intelligence Community were modulated accordingly.

That was then. Over the last 20 years, requirements and expectations have grown exponentially. Paraphrasing former Director of Central Intelligence Jim Woolsey, we once focused most of our attention on one big dragon, the Soviet Empire; now we have to deal with thousands of snakes of various sizes and lethality, many of which may not be dangerous at all. The increase in the scope of what we are expected to “know” came about for many reasons but mostly because we—three presidential administrations, the Congress, and the American people—redefined the scope and meaning of national security. You can see the evolution quite clearly if you skim the unclassified versions of the Annual Threat Assessments (sometimes called the World-Wide Threat Assessment) presented to the Congress every year as part of the budget justification process.

Two decades ago, the reports focused on strategic threats to our survival as a nation—nuclear annihilation, conventional warfare, and the development and proliferation of various kinds of weapons. In testimony that I delivered in January 2001, and in parallel testimony by Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, we declared terrorism to be the greatest threat facing our country. Last month, Director of National Intelligence Denny Blair’s Statement for the record presenting the coordinated views of all components of the Intelligence Community declared the global financial crisis to be the primary near-term security concern. The Soviet Union no longer exists, nuclear war has receded as a concern, former adversaries have become NATO allies, and China is viewed as both economic partner and competitor. The list of threats now includes the effects of global warming, the spread of infectious disease, the price and availability of oil and natural gas, and a host of other topics that were once considered beyond the scope of national security concerns.

The dramatic expansion of the scope of intelligence requirements and concerns did not occur simply because the Intelligence Community was looking for something to do after the demise of the Soviet Union. There may have been some of that--the Intelligence Community was reduced by roughly 25 percent in the 1990s--but from my vantage point as a senior official, the most significant drivers were new concerns and objectives articulated within the executive branch and/or the Congress. As policymakers realized that they needed to know more about a host of challenges and opportunities that had not made it onto the radar screens of their predecessors, they turned to the Intelligence Community. I suspect that the main reason they did so was because we were there. That, and because we are essentially a “free good” at the disposal of officials who do not have to cover our costs from their own budgets. Because we have a strong “can do” culture, shared the sense that it was necessary to redefine the scope and content of “national security concerns,” and possibly because some were eager for a new mission, we

accepted the new requirements and began providing input on the widening range of subjects.

Try to remember where we are in this evolutionary narrative while I digress to illustrate the kind of questions we are now being asked by citing an example from my own direct experience. It occurred in 1994 in the aftermath of appalling ethnic violence in Rwanda that resulted in the death of some 800,000 people in the space of two months. (Those who have seen the film *Hotel Rwanda* will know what I'm talking about.) At one point, approximately 200,000 refugees from the violence escaped into western Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and collapsed in exhaustion in an area known as the Valley of Death where the international community geared up to provide food and shelter. The area was at the foot of an active volcano spewing toxic fumes and apparently on the verge of another eruption. Aid officials faced a dilemma: if they tried to relocate the exhausted and dehydrated refugees too quickly, many would die; if they left them there, they might be killed by flowing lava or noxious gasses. The question directed to me was, "When will the volcano erupt and, if it does, which way will the lava flow?" That was not a traditional intelligence question and I wasn't going to get the answer by tapping Mother Nature's telephone. But we did get an answer. The Geographer of the United States, who worked for me in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, went to the US Geological Survey, which put us in touch with specialists on the Nyiragongo volcano. The vulcanologists judged that in the next eruption, lava would flow down the side of the volcano away from the camp. That input, which we obtained in a matter of hours, influenced the decision not to relocate the camp and the exhausted refugees. This example illustrates both the nature of new intelligence questions and the need to develop networks of experts inside and outside of the Intelligence Community.

Back to the main storyline. The third stream of developments affecting expectations regarding what the Intelligence Community can—or should be able to do--derives from what I would characterize as a shift in focus from the security of the nation to the safety of individual citizens. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 underscored and intensified this shift and one can make a convincing argument that it has gone too far. The point I want to make here, however, is that the criterion for evaluating government success and Intelligence Community performance has been elevated from detecting, deterring, and/or defeating any threats to the survival of our nation and way of life to one that comes pretty close to detecting and preventing harm to every American, anywhere in the world, all the time. To state the change in this way is, of course, to overstate what has happened. But not by much. The Intelligence Community has a long history of focusing on the intentions and capabilities of other nations and foreign leaders. We still do that but must also identify, penetrate, and monitor very small groups of potential terrorists who might attack a US Embassy or American citizens working for an international NGO on the other side of the world--or a school or shopping center in the United States. To illustrate and underscore this point, I simply call your attention to the horrific execution in Pakistan of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl and to media suggestions that his kidnapping and death were the result of another "intelligence failure."

The redefinition of national security to encompass the fate of individual Americans and

US facilities is reflected in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. That legislation redefined “national intelligence” and “intelligence related to national security” to include to all intelligence, whether gathered inside or outside of the United States, that involves threats to “the United States, its people, property, or interests.” We could have a long discussion of the civil liberties and law enforcement issues raised by this provision—and to attendant concerns and fears about “spying on Americans,” but we don’t have time for another long digression. The point that I am trying to make here is that, quite apart from the civil liberties concerns, which are real, raising the bar from “threats to our national survival” to “threats to the safety of all Americans” imposes enormously more difficult requirements on the Intelligence Community.

The final stream of developments contributing to the escalation of expectations regarding the Intelligence Community involves what I will call time compression. In the good old days of the Cold War—and yes, I know that they really weren’t so good—we had weeks, months, and years to find and follow potential threats. For example, when the Soviets built a new missile submarine, we often knew about their intention to do so, watched the keel being laid and monitored the sub’s subsequent construction, departure for sea trials, relevant missile tests, and eventual operational deployment. While that was happening, my kids went from kindergarten to high school. Not only did we have a long time to study phenomena of concern, we (happily) almost never had to act on the intelligence beyond developing countermeasures and even better monitoring systems. There was plenty of time and opportunity to make course corrections as we learned more about the problem. That, too, has changed.

Now a large and still growing percentage of what we do must conform to very short decision timelines. Here, too, there are many causes and manifestations. One is the 24-hour news cycle. If something happens, or is reported to be imminent, policymakers seemingly feel compelled to comment or to demonstrate that they are on top of the issue. Before doing so, they frequently go to the Intelligence Community with some variant of the “Is that right?” question. “I’ll get back to you next week” is not an acceptable answer. Among other consequences, this means that we need both a very large reserve of “fire extinguishers”—analysts and collection activities providing “global coverage” with at least a watching brief so they can quickly get up to speed when needed and/or can provide an informed response to short-fuse taskings. It also means that we need to develop and maintain extensive networks of “outside experts” knowledgeable on particular subjects, willing to share what they know with the US Government, and sufficiently attuned to the pace and other requirements of Washington to provide timely and targeted input to a process that simply cannot wait.

The need for speed is compounded by the need for expertise. The Intelligence Community has a formal and quite effective process for establishing priorities. We use the prioritization framework primarily to guide collection but it also affects budgets and the number and experience of analysts assigned to different topics. Despite the prioritization of topics, we must, as noted above, maintain sufficient coverage of “everything” to be able to respond quickly. We also need to maintain sufficient expertise

to be able to interpret and assess complex phenomena in a very short time. The onset of a crisis is not the best time to begin to collect basic data, establish baseline descriptions, identify outside experts, and formulate alternative hypotheses to explain observed phenomena and close information gaps. Maintaining the requisite levels of expertise on literally thousands of topics is a major challenge. This challenge is made more difficult by demographics: more than 50 percent of Intelligence Community personnel joined the government after 9/11. Think about that and the implications of having to deal with more and harder questions and the need for speed. The resultant challenges and dangers are both obvious and substantial. But that isn't all.

In addition to having less time to wrestle with more complex problems than ever before, we must meet higher standards for accuracy and precision. In the jargon of our profession, we need to provide more "actionable intelligence." It is no longer good enough to know that an adversary is building a new military installation that will take months or years to construct, giving us plenty of time to learn more about it. Much of what we did in the past played out on that kind of timeline and amounted to a kind of intellectual voyeurism. Now, the requirements for force protection, avoidance of collateral damage, interdiction of drug traffickers, etc. requires far more precision and errors are far more exposed. I will cite just a few more examples.

The first involves a Chinese ship named the *Yin He*. In 1993, we obtained intelligence—considered to be extremely reliable by the collectors—that the *Yin He* was transporting a particular chemical weapons precursor to Iran. The chemical was on a list of proscribed items and the new Clinton administration wanted to block delivery. Our Ambassador in Beijing asked the Chinese government to look into the matter and was subsequently told by President Jiang Zemin that the ship was not carrying the proscribed chemical. The collectors stood by the accuracy of their information and the Saudis agreed to search the ship during an intermediate stop. China specialists in the Intelligence Community and the State Department insisted that searching the ship was a bad idea because Jiang would not have said what he did unless he was certain that the chemicals were not there. Well, we searched the ship and didn't find anything. This too could be the subject of a long discussion, but here I want simply to note that we are still suffering the consequences of that misguided interdiction effort because the Chinese and many others cite the *Yin He* episode almost every time we tell them we have intelligence that something untoward is about to happen and request their assistance.

The second example is much shorter because I'm sure you all recall the incident in 1999 when the US mistakenly bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. According to the database used for targeting purposes, the Chinese Embassy was located some distance from the site targeted, which was thought to be a military warehouse. The database was out of date. Many in China, and around the world, believed at the time, and continue to believe today, that the attack was deliberate. It wasn't, but the error illustrates the high bar for accuracy that we must meet every day. To underscore this point, I simply refer you to the ongoing debate about collateral damage from military operations in Afghanistan.

Before concluding this talk, I'd like to share just one more story because I think it illustrates many of the points I've attempted to make this evening. In the mid 1980s, I was part of the skeleton crew working in the State Department on a Saturday morning when I discovered an intelligence report that the Communist Party of the Philippines planned to blow up an unnamed tourist hotel in Manila. According to the report, the bomb would explode in slightly more than one hour. After trying unsuccessfully to reach a Philippine analyst, I took the report to the senior East Asia officer on duty. He framed his choices as follows: If I urge the government to evacuate the hotels and no explosion occurs, I will undercut the tourist economy and the credibility of the new government. If I don't do that and a bomb explodes, people will die and we will have failed to do anything to prevent it. He looked at me and said, "Is the report true? Your call will determine what I do." I swallowed hard and answered that such an act would be inconsistent with my understanding of the *modus operandi* of the communists in the Philippines and that I did not think it was true. He thanked me and alerted his boss and our embassy, but not the Philippine government. Then we both waited nervously for the deadline to pass. Thankfully, nothing exploded. That kind of experience was relatively infrequent then; now it is repeated almost daily. One can argue about whether I should have erred on the side of safety by taking a "prudent" worst-case approach, but I simply note in passing that worst-case scenarios almost never happen and crying wolf has real consequences.

Conclusion

I have thrown a great deal of information at you and you have been patient with my war stories which, I hope, have provided insight into the challenges, capabilities and limitations of your Intelligence Community. There is much more to discuss and I hope some of you will return for the other lectures in this series. But, more importantly, I hope that you will leave the hall this evening with a better understanding of what the dedicated men and women of the Intelligence Community do on your behalf, the challenges they face, and the extraordinary professionalism and dedication that they bring to the job. We are not a collection of James and Jane Bonds, but neither are we the Keystone Kops. Our job is to protect the security of our country and the safety of our people by reducing uncertainty and providing insight and information to those who make policy decisions. I hope you leave tonight with more insight into and understanding of the process and our role in it than you had when you came in. Thank you for your attention.