

Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy

Robert D'A. Henderson

Volume 15, numéro 1, spring 1995

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs15_01br08

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Henderson, R. D. (1995). Intelligence and the Mirror:: On Creating an Enemy. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 15(1), 144–146.

Bathurst, Robert E. *Intelligence and the Mirror: On Creating an Enemy*. Oslo: International Peace Research Institute, and London: SAGE Publications, 1993.

Robert Bathurst's thesis is that the language and culture of (military) intelligence analysis organizations define what information is accepted as "real" or "not real" regarding an enemy's intentions — a view with which this reviewer would agree. By employing semiotics or the "analysis of texts," he seeks to analytically explore how language constrains and shapes "reality" in intelligence analysis, and in particular American analysis of the Soviet Union during the Cold War period. But his examples demonstrate more that American ethnocentric (and bureaucratic) perceptions of Russia twisted US intelligence estimates than they do the value of semiotics as an analytical guide to future intelligence analysis.

This monograph shows evidence of considerable contemplation by Bathurst of Russian/Soviet culture and literature — first as a military intelligence practitioner reaching the rank of US Navy Captain and subsequently as a teacher, writer and lecturer on cross-cultural projections. But his "mirror imaging" of Russia/Soviet Union by American analysts appears to be more of a cognitive assessment than one of language. Further, the monograph attempts to answer too many questions — interesting though many of them are — by synthesizing a number of underlying issues, with the result that his main thesis loses much of its potential analytical power. His interesting insights into Soviet/Russian and American cultures get lost "in the woods" of these cross-cutting issues — at least six of which this reviewer identified. Even his concluding chapter fails to conclude — which even the author himself acknowledges is "without conclusions." (p. 128)

By diffusing his thesis across these various underlying issues (each with their own individual validity), Bathurst's writing loses focus and makes the reader's passage through the text seem repetitive both in ideas and in prose. However, this is not to say that the monograph lacks thought-provoking insights; rather it is a question of weak organization and structuring of the subject. Many of his empirical observations can be categorized under perhaps six issues. First, it is important for intelligence analysts, particularly military analysts, to understand foreign cultures in order to discern any enemy intentions. Of course, this need to understand foreign cultures and therefore their goals and intentions has been a traditional objective of those entrusted with providing "foreknowledge of the enemy," stretching back to Sun Tzu in sixth century BC China. Second, there is the problem of "boxes" in intelligence analysis. (pp. 1-5) According to Bathurst, these boxes are "created or negotiated realities" constructed by the organizational cultures of the analysts and within which intelligence estimates are required to be placed. Many of his principal insights into the Cold War "main enemy" confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, such as why US defence intelligence estimates consistently exaggerated the quantity and quality of Soviet advanced weapons, arise directly out of the importance of understanding other cultures. While acknowledging that American "bureaucratic politics" played a role, he tends to downplay it in comparison to lack of understanding of Russian culture.

Third, Soviet/Russian culture reflects situations and events that are perceived from a distinctly different perspective than American culture; for example, Russians dream of the future while Americans live for the moment. These cultural asymmetries were graphically demonstrated by his check list of differing thought patterns on "problems of war termination" as they existed toward the end of the Cold War. (pp. 109-14) Fourth, there are various inherent bureaucratic and ethnocentric factors adversely affecting the quality of intelligence analysts. Scattered though they are, his observations on the impact of these factors on American analysts are devastating, particularly now in a time of fiscal cuts. (eg. pp. 119-20) Fifth, the designation of a foreign country as an "enemy" can be an important organizing or ordering concept for both governments and their intelligence bureaucracies. (eg. pp. 64-65) And sixth, there are organizational characteristics specific to the military intelligence process but are adverse to understanding other cultures.

Repeatedly, Bathurst gives the impression that much of what he writes has not been dealt with elsewhere. Perhaps as a result, he makes little effort to place his own analysis and insights within the context of, or in comparison to, other significant writings on "intelligence analysis," "other culture," and the "enemy" — all key issues in the post-Cold War world. This reviewer would have been interested, for example, to read the author's consideration of the writings of Adda Bozeman, who has argued at length in her collected essays in *Strategic Intelligence and Statecraft* (Washington, DC: Brassey's (US), 1992), that successful intelligence analysts must possess a firm understanding of other cultures. Or of such seminal writings on the concept of enemy in international affairs, such as are found in David Finlay, et al., *Enemies in Politics* (New York: Rand McNally, 1967), or Ernest May, ed., *Knowing One's Enemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). Or even of writings which have specifically dealt with US military intelligence, such as G. Hopple and B. Watson, ed., *The Military Intelligence Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986).

Notwithstanding the book cover claim that the monograph was "written for the military and political studies communities, military intelligence and government analysts, and all those concerned with conflict resolution and the threat of war," there is little discussion of the pertinent literature. In fact, the monograph lacks a bibliography and an subject index, both of which might have helped clarify some of its structure. To further diffuse the monograph's focus, many of the chapter sub-headings are literary but uninformative and there are a number of typographic errors — some humorous, such as "the night court in Lost [sic] Angeles." (p. 122) In other places, there appears to be a loss of writing focus, such as "the crisis had moved to Grenada" (p. 116) when Cuba in 1962 would appear to be the topic example.

There are considerable perceptual insights to be derived from this densely-written monograph. But these insights are unlikely to be noted by its declared-target audience — due to constraints of subject focus and available reading time — and

particularly *not* those individuals who would seem to have the most to gain from reading its thesis, namely professional intelligence managers in the post-Cold War era. Even so, they could still benefit from at least reading the final chapter on "Threats and Enemies."

Robert D'A. Henderson
Ottawa

Farcau, Bruce W. *The Coup: Tactics in the Seizure of Power*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994.

Although coups may be losing their status as the most frequently used means to change Third World governments, they continue to be a readily available instrument to military forces dissatisfied with conditions in their societies. This study by Bruce Farcau, a US foreign service officer who was stationed in Bolivia during two of that state's frequent coups, provides a most useful guide to the characteristics of Latin American military forces and the ways in which they plan and execute coups when they conclude that this form of military intervention is required.

Farcau, the author of two political novels, *Crisis* and *Coup!*, under the pen name of Alexander M. Grace, aims this study at the "informed layman" rather than the academic community. Consequently, this is a jargon-free explanation of the tactics of organizing an illegal, high-risk act that has the awesome objective of taking political control of a state. Although he devotes a chapter to a review of the causal theories of coups — all of which he finds deficient except for those that stress the personal ambition and motives of individual officers — Farcau's primary purpose is to explain the dynamics of coup plotting and execution, using case studies to illustrate the general principles of recruiting conspirators, mobilizing necessary resources, establishing targets, and executing the coup.

This book is less of a "how-to-do-it" manual than is Edward Luttwak's *Coup d'Etat — A Practical Handbook*, (London: Allen Lane, 1968) as Farcau emphasizes, but many of the same issues of organization and strategy are covered. A comparison of the two is inevitable. While the general principles discussed by Luttwak, derived from Third World characteristics and examples, are still valid, his shorter book is now quite dated in the data and examples of coups he provides. Farcau's book is a more expansive discussion of coup plotting, based upon his interviews with coup participants and his own first-hand observations. It is, however, quite limited geographically as it is set very much in the context of Latin American culture, economic conditions, and political and military institutions. Except for a brief case study of the failed coup attempt in Spain in 1936 and not very