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# The Classifieds: Secret Intelligence Activities in a Representative Democracy

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**Abstract.** This article posits that most classified intelligence activities of representative democracies may be more harmful than helpful to their security.

The covert and clandestine attempts at political influence and the collection of intelligence, the classification of these efforts, and the further classification of the structure, function, process, and content of intelligence operations and analysis have in toto been called the second oldest profession. However, the entire classified intelligence effort may be more like the oldest profession. As boxing promoter Don King might state, it's "trickology," but it's difficult to know for sure on whom the trick is being played.

Intelligence analysis. Most of what intelligence analysts are asked can be answered through impeccable and creative scholarship. Their materials are so-called open-source information: books, magazines, websites, travel accounts, technical reports. This view is promulgated by, among others, Markus Wolf (see below), former head of East German foreign intelligence, a fact which may simultaneously support and more likely doom it given his complicity in "Romeo," terrorist, and so-called "wet" operations in support of collection for analysis and in support of operations. There are exceptions--e.g., the quest for the thickness and make-up of a door prior to breaking it down in a counterterrorist effort, some dire secret formula, or the differentiation between bluffing a war and starting one. But, again, these are the exceptions. Perhaps they should be the rule.

Many creators and consumers of classified intelligence tend to have a bias that an opinion, view, or belief is more likely to be correct if it is supported by classified information than if it is not. (Both for analysis and operations, one might wonder whether consumers and some providers are actually kleptomaniacs--often engaged in stealing what is legally available, thus rendering the same final product somehow sexier.) This bias exists even though the human sources of such information may have an even greater investment in furthering a particular point of view than a spin doctor, reporter, or "man in the street." These sources--by definition violating the trust placed in them by their own authorities--are somehow expected by their "handlers" not to be violating the trust placed in them by their handlers. (If the handler has placed little trust in the source, information usually will be viewed as having little reliability.) This bias towards a greater credibility for secret information can easily be exploited by an adversary's deception programs that can create misleading cues as well as double agents--who admittedly can be turned again and again.

In fact, the biggest problem for intelligence is the sheer magnitude of information that is available to be processed and analyzed before intelligence taskings are developed and levied.

Intelligence operations. Likewise, attempts to influence political trends, patterns, and events may usually be best carried out in an open fashion. As the world becomes more "globalized" and in many ways transparent, this becomes ever more the case. Speeches; changes in interest rates and currency values; the development, deployment, and redeployment of military assets; and agreements/alliances/treaties are some of the typical coins of the realm. Perhaps the former United

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States President, Dwight Eisenhower, had it right in pushing for "open skies" approaches to nuclear weapons and related security assets and activities.

Up to now, moral and ethical concerns towards intelligence have not even been raised. There are two main classes of complaints: those that refer to a representative democracy's compromising of its own professed goals and values, and those that refer to individual compromises of morals and ethics, which may become or lead to acts of malfeasance. In addition, there are the common bureaucratic phenomena that often act to prolong the existence of an organization regardless of its utility to the authorities who founded it. Moreover, as globalization and transparency increase, the possibility for plausible deniability of acts decreases. In essence, a government leader will be more easily perceived as a crude liar for not taking responsibility for some act.

So, why are most classified intelligence activities like the world's oldest profession? In prostitution the "trick" believes that for a moment there is a degree of intimacy, of power, of control over another person or persons which otherwise does not exist. And usually the converse is occurring. Money is the usual lubricant for the trick to believe. In classified intelligence, the "trick" (consumer) believes that there is also an otherwise nonexistent degree of intimacy (of knowledge), power, and control. Moreover, not only the trick but the trickster--analyst or operator--also often succumbs to misbelief.

The resistance of maintaining extensive classified activities on the part of governmental leaders in the face of attacks by segments of its citizens--let alone by agents of influence--may not only reflect a sincere credibility bias, the desire to control embarrassing information, and the need to protect turf and livelihood, but also a cancer threatening the very freedoms that these activities allegedly have been created to protect. This seems to be the case on both sides of the strategic-moral calculus and has been aptly depicted by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* at first does not believe, then believes, then commits murders and egregiously damages his political domain in attempts to change the prophecies of the witches. He ends up killed by *Macduff* in battle. *Banquo* at first doesn't believe their prophecies but then allows that, even if true, they harbor only a portion of the truth and often are accompanied by evil. He ends up murdered by *Macbeth's* assassins. Food for thought at the next intelligence operations or analysis briefing (Berkowitz, B. (1997.) *Information technology and intelligence reform*. *Orbis*, 41, 107-118; Holden-Rhodes, J.F. (1997.) *Sharing the secrets: Open source intelligence and the war on drugs*. NY: Thayer; Kennan, G. (May 18, 1997.) *Spy and counterspy*. *The New York Times*, p. E17; Shakespeare, W. *Macbeth*. New York: Routledge; Sherr, James. (1994.) *Cultures of spying*. *National Interest*, Winter 1994, 56-62; Wolf, M. with A. McElvoy. (1997.) *Man without a face: The autobiography of Communism's greatest spymaster*. NY: Times Books.) (Keywords: Analysis, Intelligence, Operations.)