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## What to Believe about What to Believe: Implications for Security Bureaucracies

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**Abstract.** This article describes psychological findings on the confidence of eyewitnesses for their own testimony and the reactions of jury members to eyewitness testimony. These findings are related to adjudications of alleged security violations.

One constituent of security bureaucracies is a group of processes for adjudicating alleged security violations. Common to many of these processes is the social configuration of a group, i.e., a de facto or formal jury, evaluating a series of individuals, i.e., de facto or formal witnesses, concerning what the latter have sensed and perceived. (There's actually an interaction here of evaluations of the eyewitness with those of the testimony.) The evaluation of the group is usually crucial to the management of the alleged security violations--including consequences for the (1) entity represented by the bureaucracy and related allied, neutral, and adversary entities; (2) the bureaucracy itself; (3) structural, functional and process aspects of the bureaucracy; and (4) individuals involved in the adjudication process including those suspected or judged as perpetrators of security violations or violators of the adjudication process.

Psychological research has clearly identified a number of problematic phenomena in the adjudication of violations wherein eyewitness testimony is salient. For example, jurors--at least in some situations--(1) ascribe more credibility to eyewitnesses than is warranted by the "arrived at facts," (2) cannot reliably discriminate between accurate and inaccurate eyewitnesses, (3) are not appropriately cognizant of the variables and parameters that affect eyewitness credibility, and (4) seem to give undue credence to how confident the witness appears. The last Issue often seems to significantly affect the others--again an unfortunate phenomenon because confidence is many times a questionable index of accuracy even proximal to the time of the event that was originally perceived by the eyewitness. Moreover, by the time the alleged security violation is adjudicated, the frequency and intensity of repeated questioning by investigators, information obtained concerning other witnesses, and briefings and practice sessions conducted by trial lawyers and their representatives may unduly affect the confidence of the eyewitness.

What does psychological research suggest about the modifiability of the above biases? Guidance and instructions by judges, de facto and formal, and the "checks and balances" provided by cross-examination do not appear to be reliably salutary. However, expert psychological testimony does so appear. Yet such testimony often is not requested or employed.

Even more than most alleged violations formally managed through the criminal justice system, adjudications of alleged security violations may have profound implications, such as surprise military or terrorist attacks, nuclear proliferation, subversion of economies, or information warfare through unauthorized control of computerized processes. The sensitivity of these implications--as well as the sources and methods of information permeating the initial identification and, then, adjudication of alleged violations--may necessitate special approaches to all aspect of bureaucratic management. Although appropriate ethical, moral, and legal oversight would seem indicated, so would a hard look at the introduction of the expert political psychologist to increase the probability that what to believe

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about what to believe should indeed be believed. (See Loftus, E.F. (1980). Impact of expert psychological testimony on the unreliability of eyewitness identification. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65, 9-15; Penrod, S., & Cutler, B. (1995). Witness confidence and witness accuracy: Assessing their forensic relation. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 4, 817-845; Stern, L.B., & Dunning, D. (1994). Distinguishing accurate from inaccurate eyewitness identifications: A reality monitoring approach. In D.F. Ross, J.D. Read, & M.P. Toglia (Eds.), *Adult eyewitness testimony* (pp. 273-299). NY: Cambridge University Press; Wells, G.L., Rydell, S.M., & Seelau, E.P. (1993). On the selection of distractors for eyewitness lineups. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78, 835-844.) (Keywords: Intelligence, Organization, Testimony.)