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## Some Psychological Impediments to Detecting Deception: Challenges for the Intelligence Analyst and Political Psychologist

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Title: Some Psychological Impediments to Detecting Deception: Challenges for the Intelligence Analyst and Political Psychologist

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Abstract. This article describes some psychological impediments to the detection of deception in political events.

As consultants to policymakers and operations personnel, the intelligence analyst and political psychologist face many significant challenges in developing an appropriate (e.g., useful, valid) model of reality. One involves assessing the accuracy of information before analytic tools are employed. Another involves evaluating the reliability and validity of these analytic tools and their products. Significant psychological impediments exist that successfully confront each challenge.

Information Accuracy. What follows are four examples under the rubric of political actors' counteranalysis. Counteranalysis is facilitated through the close reading of relevant open-source data and only further improved through the unauthorized obtaining of classified information. (1) Positive attraction towards, identification with, or introjection of political actors may facilitate being deceived by these actors. Protestations by actors of being innocent of proscribed, unethical, immoral, illegal, or illicit behaviors may be more likely believed. In fact, protestations may not even be necessary if a consultant's expectations mitigate against seriously considering that actors are engaging in such behaviors. Thus, actors can seek to exploit the consultant through the latter's deception of self or the formers' deception of other. (2) Aversion to, projection onto, or projective identification with political actors may also facilitate being deceived by political actors. For example, an actor may seek to reinforce inaccurate notions within the consultant of said actors having engaged in or planning to engage in unsavory behaviors. The consultant--"proven" wrong on several or even one occasion--may more likely not be believed when the truth has been developed and identified. (As well, positive reactions may suggest actors are more deceptive--while negative reactions suggest less deception--dependent on the associative networks of the consultant. The logical sequelae would then likely occur.) (3) The more time that a consultation may take, political actors may become more and more cognizant of the consultant's belief systems, methodologies, expectations, and values--all of which may be considered vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities can then be more likely exploited. (Also, with time, more and more data analyzed by the consultant varies as to perishability, fluctuations in accuracy, reliability, validity, utility, and so on. It often becomes more difficult to effect a conclusion based on so many different temporal strata.) (4) Irrespective of the actor's efforts--as with (3) above--the consultant will be vulnerable to the various biases that continue to be empirically validated by social cognition researchers, such as the false consensus effect; disparities between confidence and accuracy; illusory correlation; and the temporal and associative phenomena of primacy, recency, salience. The social cognition and other behavioral science literatures, of course, are fertile fields to mine by consultants and political actors against their real and potential foes and competitors as well.

Reliability and Validity of Analytic Tools. Actuarial methods based on the mindless reliance on statistical tables are more and more commonly viewed as superior to those methods based on less formal and less systematic methods--e.g., human intuition and the necessarily less consistent human "mind." Empirical

research on predicting human social behavior--viz., deception--very often support this view nomothetically. Unfortunately, in the political life, an error in a single case may present unacceptable consequences. Empirical research related to predicting deception does not often support the superiority of actuarial methods in such circumstances, and beliefs to the contrary are ideological and at times even delusional. This is even more the case when political actors' behavior suggests high reactance--although reactance can as well be exploited by the consultant providing advice to the policymaker and especially operations personnel.

With challenges concerning information and analytic tools, the consultant might consider the following: Detecting deception through interpreting characteristics of political actors has the highest probability of success if the actors (1) do not know which characteristics are salient to the consultant and (2) cannot fake them. (See Barrick, M.R., & Mount, M.K. (1996). Effects of impression management and self-deception on the predictive validity of personal constructs. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81, 261-272; Burgoon, J.K., Buller, D.B., Floyd, K., & Grandpre, J. (1996). Deceptive realities: Sender, receiver, and observer perspectives in deceptive conversations. *Communication Research*, 23, 724-748; Ekman, P. (1992). *Telling lies*. NY: W.W. Norton & Company; Johnson, E.A. (1995). Self-deceptive coping: Adaptive only in ambiguous contexts. *Journal of Personality*, 63, 759-791; Johnson, E.A., Vincent, N., & Ross, L. (1997). Self-deception versus self-esteem in buffering the negative effects of failure. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 31, 385-405; Surbey, M.K., & McNally, J.J. (1997). Self-deception as a mediator of cooperation and defection in varying social contexts described in the iterated prisoner's dilemma. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 18, 417-435.) (Keywords: Deception, Intelligence.)