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A Triadic Approach to Deception in Strategic Counterintelligence Operations

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Empirical psychological research is proliferating on deception detection in the context of interviews, interrogation, conversation, written narratives, and extemporaneous and formal remarks. There are several presumptions behind this research. One is that there is a discrete psychological phenomenon, viz., the intention to maintain, create, or influence some sort of misperception in one or more people, that can be systematically studied (1). Another is that there are indicators causing or correlated with the phenomenon that can be reliably and validly identified (2). Yet another is that there are communication tactics and strategies that can make the identification of these indicators easier or more difficult (3). These tactics and strategies can be employed not only by anyone seeking to deceive but also to tell the truth, e.g., both interrogator and interrogatee. Although research continues to yield generalizations supporting these presumptions, the magic bullets and litmus tests of knowledge that can ensure accurate determinations with specific people in specific situations have not been and may not be identified (4).

This shortfall also characterizes deception attempts employed in strategic counterintelligence operations. These operations are initiated by representatives of countries, governments, non-government organizations, and transnational groups. These representatives seek to influence the collection, analysis, clandestine/covert operations, and counterintelligence capabilities of targets such as adversaries, neutrals, and even allies. The intent of the *initiator* is to develop, maintain, or otherwise influence a misperception in the *target* leading to behavior supportive of the initiator's strategic goals and detrimental to or less supportive of the strategic goals of the *target*.

Examples abound. The *target* collects the wrong information; comes to inaccurate interpretations of the right information; launches clandestine/covert operations that are likely to achieve the wrong ends; tactical counterintelligence resources will be dedicated to the wrong threat or the right threat with the wrong combination of resources. The very strategic goals of the *target* may be conceived by the target in a manner detrimental to the *target's* military, political, economic, and socio-cultural viability.

But there are complications. At the very moment the initiator is planning against the target, the *target* is planning against the *initiator*. The very deception attempted by the *initiator* is actually desired by the target, because it fits into a larger deception intended by the *target* against the *initiator*. So, the *initiator* is also a *target*, the *target* also an *initiator*.

And on the global stage there is a third actor, the *observer*, watching what's happening between *initiator* and *target*. Watching what works and what doesn't to be used in deception attempts against *initiator* and *target* sometime in the future. Yet pure

observation is unlikely in that the observer concurrently may be an initiator and/or target in relation to the initiator and target being observed. We're left with a triadic conception of the world of strategic counterintelligence, and one that is hyper-dimensional and characterized as a hyperreality. The former denotes the same actor on the global stage becoming and being an initiator, target, and observer at any moment in the present, past, and future. The latter denotes the consequence of the hyper-dimensional and is best described by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard--an inability of to differentiate reality from a simulation of reality, especially in societies characterized by technological change and cultural skepticism as to the nature of truth. A recently published article on triadic influence attempts supports at least some of the above analysis (6).

A conclusion might be that empirical psychological research can only take us so far without the interpretive and narrative approaches to meaning and knowledge from historiography, hermeneutics, exegesis, and literary criticism (7). Just as the Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus noted that in the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king (8), in the world of deception the American director Stanley Kubrick noted that our eyes are wide shut (9).

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Keywords: Counterintelligence. Deception. Information War. Lies. Propaganda. Truth.

Abstract/Description: This article describes a model for inducing deception in strategic counterintelligence operations based on the psychology of communications and influence.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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