INTRODUCTION

OVERTURE

On September 22, 1947, in response to the rapidly escalating Cold War, U.S. President Harry Truman created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In the dry language of the National Security Act of 1947, the core responsibility of the agency was "to correlate and evaluate the intelligence relating to national security, and to provide for the appropriate dissemination of such intelligence within the government."[1] Washington shorthand for the CIA's mission was "to prevent another Pearl Harbor"[2]—obviously a remit to give strategic warning, not to thwart further attacks by the Japanese Imperial Navy. In short, the CIA was charged with preventing strategic surprises to the United States in the realm of foreign affairs. The agency's multiple failures to meet that demanding charge—at tremendous cost—are the subject of this book.

In 1962, for example, the CIA's estimate of the likelihood that the Soviets would place nuclear missiles in Cuba proved completely wrong. The agency's misjudgment was not simply a question, as chief analyst Sherman Kent put it, of coming down "on the wrong side" in a single intelligence estimate.[3] It was a fundamental misreading of the intentions and logistical capabilities of the USSR. It included a failure to learn facts that, had they been known, could have proved crucial to the risk calculations made by President Kennedy's team following the discovery of the missiles. The agency missed, for example, that the USSR had managed to slip both the missiles' nuclear warheads *and* tactical nuclear weapons into Cuba—a facet of the crisis that put the United States and the Soviets closer to a nuclear holocaust than either side recognized at the time.[4] Agency analysts made these misjudgments despite vigorous warnings

about the probability of the USSR positioning missiles in Cuba, warnings provided months before the rockets were discovered.

Sixteen years later, in 1978, Iran was a key U.S. ally. Samuel Huntington was a staff member of President Carter's National Security Council (NSC). In September of that year, when the Iranian Army shot and killed peaceful demonstrators in the "Jaleh Square massacre," indicators of a revolutionary climate soared. Huntington asked the CIA for an assessment of a post-shah Iran. In response, the agency sent him "a discussion of the Iranian constitution and the chances of creating a regency council for a transition within the Pahlavi dynasty,"[5] with no mention of the immensely popular but exiled Ayatollah Khomeini or of any potential revolution. The year before, the CIA's formal sixty-page Iran estimate concluded, "The Shah will be an active participant in Iranian political life well into the 1980s," saying that there would "be no radical change in Iranian political behavior in the near future."[6] For several years before the Islamic Revolution, however, businessmen had noted that Iranians were sending record amounts of money out of the country. Private business risk management services were also questioning the stability of Iran. Moreover, in the spring of 1978, the French newspaper *Le Monde* ran a series of articles detailing grave trouble for the shah. French and Israeli intelligence also detected Iran's revolutionary rumblings well in advance. Nevertheless, the agency was caught off guard.

Eleven years later, in 1989, the CIA's original raison d'être, the Soviet empire, started collapsing. According to former DCI—director of central intelligence, as the head of the CIA is called—Stansfield Turner, the CIA's corporate view missed this event "by a mile."[7] In large part, this was because for decades the agency's understanding of the Soviet economy was seriously flawed. The CIA, for example, put Soviet military spending at 11 to 15 percent of GNP (gross national product)[8] between 1975 and 1980; after the breakup of the USSR, it was clear that this estimate was approximately one-third as large as the actual figures.[9] In other words, for decades the agency underestimated the military burden on the economy of the primary U.S. global competitor by a factor of 200 percent. The CIA also underrated the fact that its main target was a multiethnic empire and that—in the colorful metaphor of a one-time chief analyst of the KGB—"the Soviet Union resembled a chocolate bar: it was creased with the furrowed lines of future division, as if the for convenience of its consumers."[10] Instead, for decades Langley[11] ignored émigré analysts telling them both that they were seriously overestimating the size of the USSR's

economy and that the centrifugal forces of nationalism in Soviet republics were increasing.

Some ten years later, the head of the CIA's "bin Ladin unit," Michael Scheuer, struggled to raise the alarm within the CIA about the danger posed by al Qa'ida.[12] In 1999, in desperation, Scheuer went outside his usual chain of command and sent an e-mail about the group directly to DCI George Tenet. Within days, Scheuer was relieved of his duties, made a junior agency librarian, and given no substantive work. As the 9/11 Commission revealed, despite producing numerous individual reports dealing with al-Qa'ida and bin Ladin,[13] prior to September 11, 2001, the CIA provided no complete portrayals of the group's strategy or of the extent of its involvement in past terrorist attacks.[14] The last National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) to focus on foreign terrorism had been in 1997; it devoted three sentences to bin Ladin, and it did not mention al-Qa'ida at all.[15]

In short, by September 12, 2001, fifty-four years and countless billions of dollars[16] after it was founded, it was clear that the CIA would not be a cure-all for America's "Pearl Harbor problem."

A NEW APPROACH TO AN OLD QUESTION

This book takes a new approach to an old question:[17] How do strategic surprises occur? More explicitly, it offers a new way of understanding strategic surprises experienced by the United States between 1947 and 2001 by looking at the agency charged with preventing such surprises, the CIA.

The word *understand* as opposed to *explain* is carefully chosen in the previous sentence. There is a tradition in the so-called social sciences[18] that approaches the human realm as natural scientists treat nature, as "outsiders." This positivist approach is usually identified with "explaining" social phenomena. The alternative approach is used here. It takes an insider's view of the human realm; it seeks to comprehend what events mean (as distinct from unearthing any laws of nature). That approach seeks "understanding,"[19] as opposed to explanation. As the following argument develops, it will become clear that this distinction is more than linguistic hairsplitting. In fact, it goes straight to the heart of the epistemology of this book—what can we know about surprise and intelligence analysis, how we can know it, and what are the implications of our knowledge and our ignorance?

It is important to emphasize that this book is not a "gotcha-style" attack on the dedicated men and women of the agency. It does not underestimate the

difficulty of their task, and it tries to avoid hindsight bias. Instead, it is an attempt by two outsiders to take a fresh approach to understanding how the CIA repeatedly failed to provide effective strategic warning over this period and to make these intelligence failures informative in order to improve analysis. Toward that end it examines the four strategic surprises already listed, the CIA itself, and Cassandras—those from both inside and outside the agency whose warnings were ignored.

In the same spirit, before going any further, we should define other key terminology used in this book. When we say *intelligence analysis*, we're using the term as shorthand to indicate all the activities related to designating, acquiring, evaluating, and distilling information into a finished intelligence "product." Popular imagination tends to associate the work of the CIA with Hollywood characters like James Bond. While the agency has a clandestine service (historically called the Directorate of Operations) carrying out some covert operations and human intelligence gathering that would correspond to the less lurid aspects of the Hollywood characterization, this book is concerned with all forms of intelligence gathering, synthesis, and analysis. During the period dealt with here, this work was carried out by the Directorate of Intelligence (DI), which employed thousands of analysts to that end. Rather than the attention-grabbing espionage and direct political action activities of the CIA, therefore, this book focuses on the seemingly mundane office-bound tasks of the agency, making much so-called espionage literature irrelevant. In other words, we are concerned with people who think rather than shoot or service dead drops for a living. These CIA analysts, as described for instance by intelligence veteran Thomas Fingar, are "information workers" who work in many ways like industry analysts in banks, strategic planning departments, or market research firms: They process large amounts of information and try to make sense of it to produce recommendations for policy—or decision makers. The difference with their civilian equivalent is that CIA analysts largely deal with secret information and that the stakes are higher as they involve U.S. national security and the fate of other nations. This book only incidentally addresses other aspects of intelligence work, such as protecting the integrity of the intelligence process from penetration by adversaries (that is, counterintelligence), or political intervention (otherwise known—even when overt—as covert action).[20] Sometimes, for the sake of variety, we'll use the abbreviation DI to stand in for CIA units performing this analytical activity.[21]

Strategic surprise is what academics call a "contested concept" because surprise and warning are sometimes matters of opinion and always matters of degree. In fact, the definition of strategic surprise has a profound impact on the lines of reasoning people use to understand it. Here, *strategic surprise* is defined as "the sudden realization that one has been operating on the basis of an erroneous threat assessment that results in a failure to anticipate a grave threat to 'vital' national interests."[22]

Notice several features of this definition. First, it emphasizes the failure by the victim of surprise as opposed to factors like skillful deception by the initiators of the surprise. Second, the inclusion of the words *grave threat to "vital" national interests* keeps this analysis firmly fixed on strategic, as opposed to tactical, surprise. The CIA makes the distinction between the two adjectives in this way: Whereas a *tactical* surprise might involve a specific incident that endangers U.S. interests, a *strategic* surprise involves "important changes in the character or level of security threats" to U.S. vital interests.[23] Most crucially, this definition of strategic surprise incorporates "erroneous threat assessment," thus opening the door to consideration of surprises stemming *both* from the deliberate actions of enemies (such as surprise attacks) *and* from unanticipated events (for example, revolutions; such diffuse phenomenon with no definitive initiators are called "mysteries" in intelligence literature). This definition would not surprise most people, but it differs sharply from that used by most books about strategic surprises. It differs because the vast majority of works—which will here be called the "orthodox school" of strategic surprise—focus almost exclusively on surprise *attacks*. In so doing, our definition shifts our focus away from the culminating event of the surprise (be it an attack, a revolution, or the collapse of an empire) and on to the logically prior antecedent conditions before the surprise: a previous misunderstanding of reality that people in the business would call an "erroneous threat assessment."

Why use such an expansive definition of strategic surprise? We do so because it flows logically from the remit of the CIA. The agency exists to provide general strategic warning to U.S. policy makers, that is, to prevent surprises. The National Security Act of 1947 that established the agency does not mention "attacks." It simply says the CIA should "correlate and evaluate the intelligence relating to national security" and provide such intelligence to the rest of the government. More importantly, the CIA itself usually accepts the view that their remit is to prevent strategic surprises of all sorts, not just

attacks. Sherman Kent, the pioneer of analysis at the CIA, wrote in *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (a foundation document for American intelligence analysts, published in 1949), that intelligence is "the knowledge which our highly placed civilians and military men must have *to safeguard the national welfare*."[24] Fifty years later, the CIA's Office of Public Affairs, in *A Consumer's Guide to Intelligence*, observed: "Reduced to its simplest terms, intelligence is knowledge and foreknowledge of the world around us—the prelude to decisions and action by US policymakers."[25] After the September 11, 2001, attacks (hereafter, 9/11), an internal CIA publication said, "The central mission of intelligence analysis is to warn US officials about dangers to national security interests and to alert them to perceived openings to advance US policy objectives."[26] Quite clearly, therefore, a definition of strategic surprise that takes in more than merely surprise attacks seems a fair place to start. After the Iranian Revolution or the collapse of the USSR, no responsible CIA analyst could say, "These events were not surprise attacks, so foreseeing them wasn't my job." Though not attacks, these events had a bearing on U.S. national security, and clearly any meaningful definition of surprise should encompass them.

THE CHALLENGE OF CASSANDRAS

How about the "Cassandras" of this book's title? The term derives from *The Iliad*, in which Cassandra, the daughter of Hecuba and Priam (king of Troy), was given the gift of prophecy by Apollo in an attempt to win her favors. When he was refused, the god could not withdraw his original gift, so Apollo ensured that though Cassandra would retain her ability to prophesy, she would never be believed. She accurately foretold the fall of Troy but was duly ignored. Accordingly, we use the term *Cassandra* to refer to an individual who anticipated the approximate course of events that comprised a strategic surprise but was nevertheless ignored. We see the ability to identify a Cassandra in each of the four cases as evidence that the surprise in question could have been anticipated by the CIA as a whole because it was indeed anticipated by some, and therefore the surprise did not occur because it was impossible to imagine.[27] These Cassandras reframe what is often an exercise in finger pointing into a problem of the sociology of knowledge. Sometimes these Cassandras were outside the agency (for example, businesspeople, foreign intelligence operatives, or émigré economists), and sometimes they were inside the agency but were still sidelined or ignored.

A few examples will help clarify and limit our definition of a Cassandra. After any major surprise, many individuals claim to have foreseen it. To qualify as a Cassandra here requires that someone anticipate a strategic surprise based on a *reasoned threat assessment*. The fact that a Tom Clancy novel prior to 2001 included an airplane suicide attack, for example, does not qualify Clancy as a Cassandra about 9/11. Moreover, the stall-keepers in Pakistani bazaars who sold calendars emblazoned "Look Out America, Usama Is Coming"[28] in 2000 also do not qualify. They were expressing as much a wish as a forecast (though such anecdotes *do* offer limited clues to the puzzle at hand and are sometimes used for that purpose in the argument to follow). Cassandras need to meet us halfway epistemologically—psychics channeling Nostradamus and biblical "scholars" finding evidence of "end times" need not apply.

As we'll see, however, the former head of the CIA's bin Ladin station—Michael Scheuer, whom 9/11 Commission staffers nicknamed "the Prophet"[29]—*does* qualify as a Cassandra. Scheuer gave the right warning (he "anticipated the approximate course of events") for the right reasons ("on the basis of a reasoned threat assessment"). In so doing, he acted as a foil to the mainstream views of the rest of the agency, and thereby his case helps us understand how strategic surprises occur.

Don't think that this means that all Cassandras are "hawks" about threats. The contrast that their assessments provide can cut both ways. A study of the Cassandras in the case of the collapse of the USSR highlight erroneous threat perception in the opposite direction: They offered far smaller (that is, more accurate) estimates of the Soviet Union's GNP and forecast societal instability when the CIA was calling the USSR stable and talking about its future in decades.

To mix literary metaphors, up to now intelligence literature has treated Cassandras as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear in *Hamlet*, walk-on figures outside the main tragedy. Most postsurprise accounts mention such people only anecdotally or as a curious aside. In contrast, this work takes Cassandras seriously and tries to treat them systematically. It does not—Tom Stoppard–like[30]—make Cassandras the sole center of the action, but it does argue that they provide valuable contrast. They do so because they illustrate how persistent attributes of the CIA's identity and culture shaped the interpretation of evidence and how such filters removed signals that might have prevented strategic surprises. They belie the idea that these surprises were in

some sense "inevitable" and thereby expose the analytical process of the CIA to constructive scrutiny.

PREVAILING EXPLANATIONS OF STRATEGIC SURPRISES

Prevailing explanations of strategic surprises concentrate on—and lay the majority of the "blame" on—intelligence *consumers* (such as political or military leaders) rather than intelligence *producers* like the CIA.[31] This book concentrates on the CIA, and therefore most issues raised by what is called the "warning–response problem" (for example, blaming the consumer) are outside its scope. After all, if the case is made successfully that the CIA itself is surprised, then the warning–response problem is moot. What concerns us is how intelligence producers—those organizations like the CIA with a specific remit to prevent surprise—fail to give adequate warning.

When scholars *do* address the contribution of intelligence producers to surprise, two tendencies reveal themselves: They either create a journalistic narrative of error within the producer without advancing an explicit theory of surprise, or they create intermediate-level theories based on psychology, organizational behavior, and so on. When you survey the topic, however, you find that these theories rarely flatly contradict of one another, but they are not fully compatible, complete, or satisfying in isolation.

Specifically, prevailing intermediate explanations of surprise fall into three main categories. The first takes an organizational behavior perspective and is best represented by *Essence of Decision*,[32] the landmark work of Graham Allison on the Cuban missile crisis, which has had a substantial impact on thinking about the topic. Allison explains the crisis through three different models: the rational actor, organizational behavior, and governmental politics. His "Model Two" (organizational behavior) is especially pertinent to the argument made here because it evolved to account for the role of organizational culture, and it explored slightly how culture can affect intelligence analysis. Allison opened (although he did not fully investigate) the questions of where organizations derive their preferences and how organizations relate to their environment. Allison's Model Three, "governmental" or "bureaucratic" politics, has also contributed richly to the literature on strategic surprise, though usually from the perspective of failures among competing agencies to cooperate, share information, or act as impediments to warning transmission and reception. Discussions of the "politicization" of intelligence are variations on

this theme, and some scholars advance variants as "institutional" explanations for surprise.

On a practical level, however, bureaucratic politics models break down as an explanation because attempts to reform intelligence structures exactly address such problems and have repeatedly been found wanting. Following Israel's 1973 intelligence failure before the Yom Kippur War, for example, the Agranat Commission produced proposals for institutional reform that amounted to copying the U.S. institutional arrangement at the same time—which had failed in precisely the same way.

The second category of intermediate explanations takes a psychological perspective. Scholars such as Robert Jervis and Richards Heuer advance the importance of psychological factors in strategic surprise and stress the role of "heuristic" shortcuts in "cold"—or cognitive—processing of information: how humans introduce biases into analysis because of their beliefs, prior experiences, and existing expectations and the individual's current cognitive "set" or agenda. Jervis also explored "hot"—or affective—mental processes: how humans' needs and emotional states alter how they process information through motivational biases. Irving Janis's work on "groupthink," stressing the emotional dynamics and pressures of small groups, also largely dealt with "hot" mental processes. Psychological explanations, however, have four limitations. First, their focus is on the moment of information processing by either analysts or decision makers. As a result, while necessary and illuminating for understanding isolated elements of strategic surprises, they are not sufficient to explain the phenomenon as a whole. This is because issues need to be considered earlier in the intelligence cycle, that is, at the tasking (what to search for) and collection stages, even before analysis (as we see with the work of Roberta Wohlstetter in the following discussion). Second, much of the psychologically oriented literature is built around *individual* analysis and decisions. However, intelligence is a group process, so collective dynamics must be captured. As anyone familiar with systems theory knows, systems can have properties that none of their individual components intends. Third, when psychological theories concentrate on the "hot" biases, they do not effectively bring to the fore long-term processes of cumulative causation in a structured manner. The Cassandras we identify were not ignored in the heat of the moment but in a sustained way. Fourth and perhaps most important, the role that one particular, historically grounded, and continually reinforced

identity or culture plays in patterns and failures in analysis is left unaddressed in psychological literature.

The third category of intermediate explanations of surprise takes a "cybernetic"—that is, systemic, information-centered—perspective by looking at the issues regarding information available on a surprise. Here, the difficulty of anticipating strategic surprises is ascribed to a "signal-to-noise" problem, or the inability to pick out so-called weak signals that foretell such surprises. This theory was advanced in a groundbreaking study of Pearl Harbor[33] by Roberta Wohlstetter. Wohlstetter advanced the idea that the Japanese attack did not succeed because of a lack of information: "At the time of Pearl Harbor the circumstances of collection in the sense of access to a huge variety of data were . . . close to ideal." Analytical problems, she wrote, arose not from too little information but from the inability to glean "information" from mere "data." (Contemporary proponents of technical fixes to intelligence like "total information awareness" please take note!) Moreover, Wohlstetter wrote, "The job of lifting signals out of a confusion of noise is an activity that is very much aided by hypotheses." We believe that Wohlstetter's insight about the role of hypotheses is key to understanding strategic surprise but also believe that up to now the question of *how* hypotheses are generated and discarded has not been systematically addressed.

In the field of intelligence, the difficulty of the wrong, insufficient, or nonexistent hypothesis is often described as that of "solving the wrong puzzle." In prior works about surprise, the wrong puzzle, or "failure of imagination," has been a deus ex machina after the surprise has already happened. It has become an "exogenous phenomenon," not analyzed in detail, explained away as an imponderable or simply ignored as an embarrassment. In the pages that follow, however, we will document that it is the culture and identity of the intelligence-producing agency that ultimately shapes, constrains, and generates the problem of the wrong puzzle and therefore that any complete understanding of strategic surprise must address identity and culture.

Richard Betts, who might be called the dean of strategic surprise, does not dispute the intermediate explanations named in the preceding paragraphs but takes a fatalistic stand and maintains that intelligence failures are inevitable. His reasoning is grounded in what he calls "paradoxes of perception." These paradoxes consist of the irresolvable trade-offs and dilemmas inherent in attempts to improve strategic warning. For instance, making warning systems more sensitive reduces the risk of surprise but increases the number of false

alarms, which in turn reduces sensitivity.[34] This played out in the Yom Kippur War, for instance, where the Egyptians repeatedly held threatening exercises near the border and then drew back. Betts's insights may indeed be true, but they should not prevent analytical failures from being instructive, and they say nothing about the problem of the wrong puzzle.

In a notable departure from mainstream analysis of surprise, Ofira Seliktar, in a work on the Iranian Revolution,[35] argued intelligence failures can best be understood in terms of Thomas Kuhn's ideas of the role of paradigms in revolutionary changes in knowledge. In a second work, she showed how Kuhn's idea help understand the U.S. foreign policy establishment surprise at the demise of the USSR. Seliktar's approach was directionally correct, and Chapters 3 and 4 owe much to her scholarship. Kuhn's paradigm approach, however, was developed to address the discovery of and theorizing about natural facts, so the wholesale application of a Kuhnian approach to an activity mostly concerned with social facts—intelligence analysis—is problematic. To get to the bottom of strategic surprise, intelligence analysis must be placed firmly in the realm of social facts, and then a specific linkage must be established between the culture and identity of an intelligence producer like the CIA and the formation and rejection of the hypotheses used to filter information.

Some existing intermediate explanations of strategic surprise ignore factors of cultural and identity altogether or treat them superficially, simply labeling an intelligence producer's culture as "dysfunctional" or not fit for the purpose. None looks at the *specific* identity and culture of intelligence producers over time and how those factors bound which and what type of surprises occur. In contrast, this book brings culture and identity to the foreground. It views intelligence analysis and strategic surprise as permeated by social facts and thus firmly in the grip of the identity and culture of the intelligence producer. It presents a model of surprise that focuses on the internal makeup of the CIA, including the identities of analysts and elements of Langley's organizational culture. It suggests that by examining these features of the agency and contrasting them with those who offered reasoned warning prior to each surprise—the Cassandras—we can arrive at a better, more unified understanding of strategic surprise generally. As a result, instead of shrugging our intellectual shoulders about future "failures of imagination," strategic surprises can become informative.

A UNIFIED UNDERSTANDING OF INTELLIGENCE FAILURE

The unified understanding of intelligence failure that this book seeks to provide is not in conflict with the prevailing intermediate explanations of strategic surprise just sketched, but it is logically prior to them. It is logically prior because it shows the genesis of the antecedent conditions that enable these narrower theories of strategic surprise to operate. It also has the virtue of parsimony.

The argument here is that because all strategic surprises have their origins in erroneous threat assessments and rejected or unformed hypotheses, one can find in the CIA's identity and culture common attributes that link them. Such an approach allows one to cut through some of the rhetorical devices employed following strategic surprises to mask errors in threat assessment. Following the collapse of the USSR, for example, one veteran intelligence official disingenuously asked, "Gorbachev himself and even his KGB didn't know, so how could the CIA?"[36] The answer, of course, is that the collapse, while not a certainty, was at least foreseeable as a possibility but not foreseen by the CIA for reasons that we will explore.

In a nutshell, this book begins with the fairly commonplace observation that the culture and identity of an organization shapes its members' perceptions and questions, affects what they notice, and changes how they interact with their environment, screening from view some parts of "reality" and magnifying others. It argues that this process inevitably frames and constrains the CIA's threat perception and thus is an underlying cause of strategic surprises. In the language of social science, this is called a "social constructivist" approach.

Such an approach allows us to use the broad definition of strategic surprise discussed in the preceding paragraphs. That definition (encompassing a revolution, the sudden demise of an empire, a surprise maneuver, and a surprise attack) allows a distinctive systematic comparison of four diverse surprises, two rooted in "secrets" and two in "mysteries." Previous comparisons of such varied surprises have been anecdotal and partial, lumping them into uninformative categories like "intelligence blunders."[37] A social constructivist approach to surprise also allows a detailed and methodically consistent look at Cassandras' role in these surprises in the general phenomenon of strategic surprise. It also allows us to weigh in with new perspectives on each case study and on strategic surprise as a whole. This new perspective concludes that a

"diverse" group of strategic surprises actually have common roots: the identity and internal culture of the CIA. It illuminates these events and shows that surprises were not—as is frequently asserted—solely outside Langley (resident in the inherent unpredictability of events) nor necessarily to be found looking at obtuse, indifferent, or overworked intelligence consumers.

The commonalities discovered highlight that the information filters imposed by identity and culture both distort tasking (that is, deciding what questions the CIA should be answering) and then impede "course correction" of threat assessment. In other words, it brings to center stage what intelligence expert Jeffrey Cooper calls "the problem of the wrong puzzle"[38] in intelligence analysis. Cooper quotes a classic intelligence aphorism: "You rarely find what you're not looking for, and you usually do find what you are looking for." If the wrong puzzles are pondered, all the other parts of the intelligence process are useless (or worse: The irrelevant information that they provide wastes resources, and results in false confidence).

This model of an identity and culture-induced negative feedback loop in threat assessment leads to another conclusion: Understanding of strategic surprise in light of identity and culture is logically prior to previous proximate, partial, and overlapping explanations. Such a unified theory makes strategic surprises informative again, as it opens the door to a better understanding of the relationships among culture, identity, and intelligence failures. Before blaming surprises on intelligence consumers, intelligence producers must demonstrate that it is not features of their identity and culture that are responsible for the poor-quality warning. If Cassandras are shown to have offered high-quality warning but have been marginalized in the intelligence production process, understanding the surprise needs to focus first on the intelligence producer (the warner), not the intelligence consumer (the warnee). This is another way of saying that although the Washington aphorism that Thomas Fingar mentions—that there are only "policy successes" and "intelligence failures"[39]—may be true, that does not mean that there are no intelligence failures. In other words, we simply detail at the level of a particular agency some of the social mechanisms by which what the strategist and scholar Edward Luttwak recently called "strategic autism"[40] occurs.

This book cannot dispose of allegations (more often hinted at than stated) that the CIA knew more than it was willing to say to intelligence consumers about the strategic surprises discussed in the following pages. *Constructing Cassandra* takes the commonsense approach that if either the agency admits it

was surprised by an event (for example, the Iranian Revolution) or documentation exists to back claims by high-level intelligence consumers that the CIA did not warn them, then the CIA failed. After all, the agency's responsibility is not to "know but don't tell"—it is to provide strategic warning, and each of the following case studies provides substantial evidence that the CIA was surprised before exploring how that surprise occurred.

Similarly, a moment's thought generates the observation that the same qualities of identity and culture that offer an understanding of the intelligence failures outlined in the following pages also offer an understanding of many of the CIA's intelligence successes. These successes—"prevented surprises"—constitute the "dark matter" of any work on intelligence failure. Here, though we acknowledge that intelligence successes are the logical flip side of failures, the CIA's many successes stay in the background. They stay in the background because any "sample" of successes is tainted by the practical fact that an unknown number of successes are secret and became "nonevents" in the public record and that this is true because of the logical problem that successful prevention frequently leads to a self-altering prediction.[41]

RECOMMENDATIONS

This book provides no easy answers to the problem of strategic surprise. It does, however, conclude with some practical recommendations for both the CIA and policy makers who rely on the agency. In part, we believe that our diagnosis of how strategic surprises arise helps fulfill our self-assigned task to make intelligence failures informative again. A unified understanding of surprises that allows for the validity and explanatory power of past approaches to the subject, while at the same time exposing the commonality among surprises, can only improve analytical efforts. We hope that an understanding of surprise based on identity and culture is a partially effective inoculation against future surprise or at least the start of a fresh reflection on the subject at the CIA and beyond.

Beyond that new understanding, we offer some practical actions that flow logically from our analysis. The most consequential of these changes may seem trivial at first glance: We suggest a seemingly modest addition to the so-called intelligence cycle (the iconic process diagram of how U.S. intelligence works), discussed in the following pages. It has been criticized,[42] but it endures both in the CIA's thinking and in its communication with the outside world.[43] In the pages that follow, the intelligence cycle is used as a lens to focus

on how identity and culture influence the full spectrum of CIA activities. The change we suggest—begin the cycle with "hypotheses," not "tasking"—may seem minor but could have far-reaching consequences.

Why add hypotheses as an explicit step in the intelligence cycle? For the CIA, such a change would accomplish three things. First, it would perpetually reinject intellect into a cycle that too easily becomes a bureaucratic process diagram. That in itself might help cut the Gordian knot that tasking has become. Second, and related to that point, this change makes refreshing hypotheses and revising assumptions an explicit, inescapable, and ongoing part of intelligence work. This may help prevent the sort of negative synergy between unquestioned hypotheses and intelligence collection and analysis that we document; it also works toward questions of "solving the wrong puzzle," discussed in the following pages. Third, hypotheses in the intelligence cycle might assist the agency when intelligence consumers demand only answers; we document in the following pages the destructiveness of making the focus of the CIA's work a mere mirror-image pursuit of answers to intelligence consumers' questions. It keeps Langley in the question-asking instead of only the answer-fetching business.

For policy makers, this change to the intelligence cycle would have two effects. First, it would perpetually remind the consumers of CIA information that hypotheses are the key mechanism by which analysts separate the "signal" of information from the background "noise" of data and events. This awareness of the ultimate importance of ideas in the agency's work would in turn reinforce the second effect: The addition of hypotheses to the intelligence cycle would remind policy makers that the work of the CIA is ambiguity, probabilities, and forecasts, not exact scientific predictions.

Several other practical recommendations to prevent strategic surprises flow from the new understanding of the subject presented here. These are best explained in detail at the end of our analysis, but in summary these are as follows.

For the CIA

1. Enforce diversity at the CIA for practical, not moral, reasons. We find that the homogeneity of the CIA personnel severely hobbles its central mission.
2. Recognize that tasking is a wicked problem for intellectual as well as bureaucratic reasons. We propose a six-step intelligence cycle beginning

with hypotheses instead of tasking partly because we believe that tasking is far more—or *should be far more*—intellectually complex than it has often been credited with being.

3. Educate, don't simply "train," analysts; ideas matter, and while there is no quick fix for the lack of ontological, epistemological, and methodological self-awareness that *Constructing Cassandra* documents, exposure to the full complexity of the dilemmas of "social science" is essential.

4. Drop the "customers" mind-set; our cases repeatedly show that this attitude leads into a wilderness of mirror imaging[44] of the customers' unconscious ignorance.

For Policy Makers

1. Accept that the CIA delivers forecasts, not predictions; part of why we recommend the addition of "hypotheses" to the intelligence cycle is exactly to keep this fact before your eyes.

2. Understand how to use CIA analysts. In keeping with the previous recommendation, understand that agency analysts are there to help you plumb the depth of an issue, not to function as infallible oracles that draw on veiled (but knowable) secrets; their statements are laced with qualifiers as a result of intellectual integrity and self-awareness.

3. Cultivate and monitor your own Cassandras; the very nature of the social and intellectual processes that we document ensure that Cassandras will occur, and the need to listen to diverse voices is not a reflection of failure by the CIA but a natural consequence of the social construction of strategic surprise.

Our suggestions will not cure everything that ails the CIA or prevent every possible strategic surprise. They would, however, offer more substantive improvements to analysis at the agency than either mindless CIA bashing or proposals that rely on the rearrangement of bureaucratic boxes that currently passes for "debate" about intelligence reform in Washington.