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New Transnational Security Challenges and Responses

# Strategic Warning in an EU Context: Achieving Common Threat Assessments

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In her hearings before the European Parliament the 11 January 2010, Baroness Ashton, the EU's new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, repeatedly underscored the importance of strengthening the Union's capacities for conflict and crisis prevention.<sup>1</sup> The same view was expressed in her written answers to the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs a few days earlier.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the recognition of the crucial role played by preventive policy is not new. It has been stressed in the past and especially so in the Union's key strategic document, the European Security Strategy (ESS) from 2003, and its five-year implementation report from 2008.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, the EU has in recent years been actively engaged in the prevention of armed conflict and has led missions on three continents. With the Lisbon Treaty in place, the current streamlining of the Common Security and Defence Policy, and the ongoing construction of the European External Action Service, this ambition – as Baroness Ashton's comments suggest – appears set to grow even further.

Achieving effective policy depends on an ability to achieve consensus among member states on the strategic level not only concerning what issues to address but also how and when to do this. The ESS indicatively states that '[c]ommon threat assessments are the best basis for common action'.<sup>4</sup> This requires capacities for strategic foresight and warning. Important components in this regard, which are often mentioned, is to work for increased sharing of information and intelligence between member states and construct more effective procedures for the dissemination of warning products. The rationale is 'the earlier, the better, and the more accurate information decisionmakers receive, the greater are the chances for successful strategic warning'. However, as theories of strategic surprise suggest, severe and generic challenges to success lie beyond these dimensions and are likely to be exacerbated in multinational settings such as the EU. This paper has two main purposes. The first is to identify such generic challenges to warning receptivity among decisionmaker 'consumers' in order to see how these might be manifested on the EU level and hence affect the prospect for achieving common threat assessments. Following that, the second purpose is to provide some proposals for how these could be mitigated, and the paper

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1 See a verbatim record of Baroness Ashton's hearings before the European Parliament on the 11 January 2010, accessed the 5 February 2010, on

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/hearings/static/commissioners/cre/ashton.pdf>

2 Written answers to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, the 6 January 2010, accessed the 16 February 2010, on [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)

3 European Council (2003), *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy* and European Council (2008), *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World*, accessed the 11 August 2009, on [www.consilium.europa.eu](http://www.consilium.europa.eu)

4 European Council (2003)

assumes in this regard a ‘warner’s perspective’. In sum, the suggestions that are made point to the need of a proactive communicative approach to warning, especially when serving a consumer body incorporating a multitude of national, cultural, and historical backgrounds. To start with, the paper examines some aspects of the production and processing of warning that underlie the ensuing discussion.<sup>5</sup>

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## THE WARNING PROCESS

What is a warning? It is often noted that this question does not have a commonly accepted answer. Three central features are nonetheless frequently identified, each having important implications for the objectives of this paper. Firstly, a warning evolves around ‘the most difficult and controversial task that intelligence analysts face, that of prediction’.<sup>6</sup> It is a judgement about a future event or development that entails ‘a significant disutility for the intended recipient’ of the warning.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, a warning is a communicative act. As practitioners repeatedly point out, warning is a communicative process where producers actively transmit a judgement of threat to decisionmakers.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, a warning implies that it is in some way possible to ‘alter the probability’ or at least to ‘ameliorate the consequences’ of the anticipated and communicated threat. That is, it is not inevitable in the form that it is depicted in the warning.<sup>9</sup> This last characteristic is according to many observers a distinguishing characteristic of warning in comparison to other forms of intelligence: ‘it implies decisions to take action’.<sup>10</sup>

Turning to the first feature of warning, the difficulties associated with anticipating human, social, and political behaviour are widely emphasised, especially in the field of international affairs.<sup>11</sup> Compared to the natural sciences, there exists no reliable predictive theory in the social sciences, and it is argued that even ‘the most robust generalizations or laws we can state [...] are close to trivial, have important exceptions, and for the most part stand outside any consistent body of theory’.<sup>12</sup> It is also generally underlined that the difficulties associated with anticipating the future have been strengthened in the post-Cold War period.<sup>13</sup> With the present era’s growing complexity in international affairs, the degree of uncertainty surrounding most aspects of estimative analysis has risen and limited the prospects for accuracy. Indeed, as Fitzsimmons notes, ‘[o]fficial assessments of the future security

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6 Kuhns, Woodrow J. (2003), ‘Intelligence Failures: Forecasting and the Lessons of Epistemology’, in Betts, Richard K. & Mahnken, Thomas G., eds., *Paradoxes in Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honour of Michael I. Handel*, (London: Frank Cass), p. 81

7 Chan, Steve (1979), ‘The Intelligence of Stupidity: Understanding Failures in Strategic Warning’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol 73, No 1, p. 171

8 McCarthy, Mary (1994), ‘The National Warning System: Striving for an Elusive Goal’, *Defense Intelligence Journal*, Vol 3, No 1; Grabo, Cynthia M. (2004), *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), p. 14

9 Chan (1979), pp. 171-173

10 Belden, Thomas G. (1977), ‘Indications, Warning, and Crisis Operations’, *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 21, No 1, p. 182

11 See e.g. Choukri, Nazli & Robinson, Thomas W., eds., (1978), *Forecasting in International Relations: Theory, Methods, Problems, Prospects*, (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company)

12 Bernstein, Steven, Lebow, Richard Ned, Stein, Janice Gross & Weber, Stephen (2000), ‘God Gave Physics the Easy Problems: Adapting Social Science to an Unpredictable World’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 6, No 43, p. 44

environment have, since the end of the Cold War, consistently acknowledged the importance of uncertainty', some documents even labelling it the 'defining characteristic of today's strategic environment'.<sup>14</sup>

Together with uncertainty, an underlying cause for the difficulties in anticipating the future rests in the tension between the two basic, and antithetical, types of judgements warning analysts, as well as other professional forecasters, are required to make. The first type concerns trends and continuity in the behaviour of the actors under observation in order to achieve good-enough generalisations of what is 'typical' and can be extrapolated into the future.<sup>15</sup> It is a linear type of judgement where the past serves as 'prologue' for the future, and '[i]n general, the greater the past experience contained in [it], the more reliable the results'.<sup>16</sup> The second type of judgement is fundamentally different from the first as it puts emphasis on discontinuity and nonlinearity. It seeks to distinguish deviant behaviour that breaks with past trends and to detect so-called 'Black Swans'; events of low probability but with high impact, underlying many of the great strategic surprises seen through history.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the previous judgement, this requires 'atheoretical' or 'exceptional' thinking and efforts to try to falsify one's generalisations about the world rather than to rest on them. In essence, they require two completely different types of mindsets.<sup>18</sup>

Turning to the second feature of the above definition, it is less noted that the tension between continuity and discontinuity also has implications for the communication of warning and consumers' receptivity to it. These implications originate from a problem identified already since the beginning of modern-day intelligence organisations: there is an inherent overlap between the activities of producers and consumers of intelligence. Scholars as well as practitioners explain that the two groups often duplicate each other's analytic work and are both equally involved in making the kind of judgements mentioned above.<sup>19</sup> Thinking about future threat is certainly not only the domain of producers. Betts writes, 'the personnel can be segregated, but the functions cannot, unless intelligence is defined narrowly as the collection of data, and analytic

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13 Feder, Stanley A. (2002), 'Forecasting for Policy Making in the Post-Cold War Period', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol 5

14 Fitzsimmons, Michael (2006), 'The Problem of Uncertainty in Strategic Planning', *Survival*, Vol 48, No 4, p. 132

15 Betts, Richard K. (2007), *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security*, (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 55-57

16 Doran, Charles F. (1999), 'Why Forecasts Fail: The Limits and Potential of Forecasting in International Relations and Economics', *International Studies Review*, Vol 1, No 2, pp. 12, 14

17 Taleb, Nassim Nicholas (2007), *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, (New York: Random House)

18 Betts (2007), p. 56-57

19 Hughes, Thomas L. (1976), *The Fate of Facts in a World of Men: Foreign Policy and Intelligence Making*, (New York: Foreign Policy Association)

responsibility is reserved for decision makers'.<sup>20</sup> Kam notes that to 'a large extent decision makers are analysts' and continues by maintaining that like 'intelligence analysts, [they] form assumptions and estimates with regard to the enemy's likely behavior.'<sup>21</sup>

The overlapping functions imply that the threat judgements being communicated by producers are often already made or will be re-made by consumers, not simply translated into decision or action in a linear fashion, which is sometimes implied by the 'intelligence cycle'. Hence, processing warning is in this sense the practise of consciously or subconsciously setting, examining, and comparing the anticipatory judgements of the warner against one's own judgements about the object of the warning. This further means that what producers can aspire to do is to influence the consumers' judgements in a way that they converge with their own. When a convergence takes place *from* producer *to* consumer, a warning can be labelled successful. On the EU level, bearing in mind the requirement of common threat assessment, success is hence reached when convergence occurs from the producer to the intended group of recipients.

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<sup>20</sup> Betts (2007), p. 26

<sup>21</sup> Kam, Ephraim (1988), *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p. 200

## CHALLENGES TO WARNING RECEPTIVITY

### Diverging Beliefs and Assumptions

The first challenge concerns the effects on communication and receptivity by the manner in which human beings tend to process incoming information, reach judgements, and make predictions. What scholars of political and cognitive psychology as well as philosophers of science since long explain is that one of the strongest factors influencing human threat judgement is the content of pre-existing beliefs, conceptions, and assumptions.<sup>22</sup> These mental representations or systems have been given different labels by different authors, but a common view is that their substance has a significant impact.<sup>23</sup> In short, our threat judgement tends to be theory-driven rather than fact-driven.

With reference to evidence from both psychology and history, Jervis explains how decisionmakers have a tendency to fit incoming information into their pre-existing theories and images, which then are crucial in determining what is noticed or received and what is not.<sup>24</sup> They seek and interpret information in a way that confirms their 'established truths'. Indeed, this is not only true on the decisionmakers' end of the spectrum. In his extensive examination of the analytic culture of the US intelligence community, Johnston finds that the same form of confirmation or pattern bias is forcefully prevalent also among analysts.<sup>25</sup> Both groups are inclined to interpret evidence in a way that sustain what they perceive as past and current trends. In terms of the two types of basic and antithetical predictive judgements, this means that producers as well as consumers of warning lean towards the epistemological mindset of the first type of judgement, often decreasing the ability to accurately make the second type. That is, building on their own knowledge and understanding of world affairs, they seek to identify continuity and linearity at the same time avoiding to see what breaks with this and represents discontinuity. Surely, producers may have a greater ability to make their own assumptions explicit, which can make them more aware of cognitive distortions. However, as both Betts and Johnston indicate, intelligence organisations' capability of dealing with theory should not be exaggerated,<sup>26</sup> and in tandem with rising complexity

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22 Jervis, Robert (1985), 'Perceiving and Coping with Threat', in Jervis, Robert, Lebow, Richard Ned & Stein, Janice Gross, *Psychology and Deterrence*, (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), p. 18

23 Tetlock, Philip E. (1998), 'Social Psychology and World Politics', in Gilbert, D., Fiske, S. T. & Lindsay, G., eds., *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4th Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill), p. 20

24 Jervis, Robert (1976), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), pp. 117-202

25 Johnston, Rob (2005), *Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study*, The Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, pp. 21-23

26 Betts (2007), pp. 53-54; Johnston (2005), p. 20

and uncertainty in international affairs, the reliance on beliefs to guide the outcome of anticipatory thinking is likely to increase within both groups.<sup>27</sup>

The theory-driven nature of threat judgements has two important implications. Firstly, the same information and evidence can lead to different judgements and assessments among people with differing belief systems.<sup>28</sup> Depending on the relation between different beliefs, there will be disagreement over what the past and current trend actually are and consequently also over what constitutes continuity. In the same way, there can be differences of opinion of what it is that represents discontinuity, trend breaks, and deviant behaviour. Accordingly, what is a 'Black Swan' to some, may be a 'White Swan' to others. Secondly, and following the previous point, when the threat judgements in the warning are reached on the basis of different beliefs than those being held by the recipient, receptivity is likely to suffer. Stein for example writes: 'When sender and recipient use quite different contexts to frame, communicate, or interpret signals, the opportunities for miscalculation and misjudgement multiply'.<sup>29</sup> Or put slightly differently, when judgements in warnings are based on beliefs that are in contrast to the 'established truths' of the recipient, the warning is less likely to influence how the recipient makes or re-makes judgements and the chances for convergence – success – will decrease.

When seeking to warn a multinational consumer body such as the EU member states, the above challenge receives an additional layer of complexity, negatively affecting the prospects for forging common threat assessments. Vertzberger explains that information processing and judgement are strongly affected by what he calls the societal-cultural prism. That is, the content of consequential beliefs and assumptions are to a large extent shaped by the particular societal and cultural background of the actor. What does this mean for the two implications of the theory-driven nature of human threat judgement? Firstly, it entails that judgements about the same situations, objects or actors may differ between people having different cultural backgrounds. Vertzberger additionally maintains that the impact of culturally bound beliefs is particularly strong with regard to judgements of threat and risk.<sup>30</sup> The 'White Swan'-'Black Swan' dichotomy may thus assume

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<sup>27</sup> Jervis, Robert (1994), 'Leadership, Post-Cold War Politics, and Psychology', *Political Psychology*, Vol 15, No 4

<sup>28</sup> Jervis (1976), pp. 163-165

<sup>29</sup> Stein, Janice Gross (1993), 'Building Politics into Psychology: The Misperception of Threat', in Kressel, Neil J., ed., *Political Psychology: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, (New York: Paragon House Publishers), p. 371

<sup>30</sup> Vertzberger, Yaacov Y. I. (1990), *The World in Their Minds: Information Processing, Cognition and Perception in Foreign Policy Decisionmaking*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press), pp. 270-272



national lines. Secondly, 'cultural differences [in beliefs] accentuate the likelihood for misperception and miscommunication',<sup>31</sup> and it implies that receptivity to warning and the prospects of convergence may vary between different states. Depending on the specific constellation and relation between consequential beliefs, some states may have a higher propensity to be influenced by the threat judgements of the producer than others. The warning has a differentiated impact, which may decrease the odds for common threat assessments.

### Diverging Preferences

The second challenge rests on two main arguments. The first refers to the third feature of warnings – they imply political action. What this means is that despite the strong culture of delineating intelligence from policy in many intelligence communities, threat judgements will always implicitly point to the need of a certain policy or of implementing a policy in a certain manner. Complete value-neutrality is impossible and producers are not likely to take an impartial position in the eyes of decisionmakers. One may even refer to a process of 'stealth issue advocacy'.<sup>32</sup> While some degree of politicisation is 'inevitable, and in some forms necessary', with regard to all types of intelligence,<sup>33</sup> it may be even more so the case when dealing with warning. This again falls back on the fact that judgements overlap. For decisionmakers, the process of diagnosing a future threat is very closely linked to the process of finding a solution to it. The judgements being advanced by the producer are therefore part of what the decisionmaker sees as policymaking.

The second argument concerns the influence that current policy inclinations and interests of decisionmakers have on the processing of information and the outcome of threat judgements. Just as was the case with beliefs and assumptions, these have a tendency to guide how evidence is selected and interpreted and the direction in which judgements are made. Jervis exemplifies: '... the spending of considerable amount of time preparing a contingency plan increases the probability that the decision-makers will see future events as resembling the situation they had contemplated and as calling for the plans they have developed.'<sup>34</sup> Referring to historical evidence, Levy similarly explains how '... perceptions of threats served to rationalize

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31 Rosati, Jerel A. (2000), 'The Power of Human Cognition in the Study of World Politics', *International Studies Review*, Vol 2, No 3, p. 51

32 Pielke, Roger A. Jr. (2007), *The Honest Broker: Making Sense of Science in Policy and Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

33 Betts (2007), p. 74

34 Jervis (1976), p. 204

existing policy rather than inform policy' and how in processes of wishful thinking 'probabilities are influenced by values' and 'desirable outcomes are seen as more likely to occur while the undesirable outcomes are seen as less likely'.<sup>35</sup>

The consequence is that receptivity to warning may suffer when the producer's implied policy option contrasts the policy inclination of the consumer. That is, the decisionmaker's preference for action (or inaction) is already set and influences the way he or she assesses probability and impact of a given threat, at the same time constraining the relative influence of the warning. Put differently, the policy inclination limits the extent to which the warning producer can influence how consumers make or re-make judgements. Intelligence producers often state that the perhaps most crucial factor affecting receptivity to intelligence is the pre-existing policy dispositions of decisionmakers. In their overview of 12 factors contributing to instances of strategic surprise, George and Smoke indicatively also distinguishes policy preferences as one of two factors that played a role in all the cases being analysed.<sup>36</sup> In situations of uncertainty and ambiguity, the scope for hanging on to one's preferred interpretations increases.

Just as EU member states are likely to represent differing cognitive preconceptions, they also reflect varying, and often contrasting, political interests and preferred policy options. The difficulties associated with consensus building in international organisations have proven this many times. As is often pointed out, one of the most crucial problems facing the Union's external relations is the persisting 'lack of consensus among member states concerning the content and direction of [foreign] policy'.<sup>37</sup> The implications are similar to those seen with regard to the cognitive dimension. In instances when the implicated policy option resonates better with certain member states than with others, the impact of the warning may be differentiated. When some countries' policy inclinations are better served by continuity they may be less likely to see a discontinuity than those whose preferences are not and vice versa. Achieving common threat assessments are in these situations made more difficult.

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35 Levy, Jack S. (2003), 'Political Psychology and Foreign Policy', in Sears, David O., Huddy, Leonie & Jervis, Robert, *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 268

36 George, Alexander L. & Smoke, Richard (1974), *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practise*, (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 584-585

37 Bretherton, Charlotte & Vogler, John (2006), *The European Union as a Global Actor*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge), p. 187

## MITIGATING CHALLENGES TO WARNING RECEPTIVITY

Having considered these two types of challenges, it is worth asking if something can be done to mitigate them, and thereby increasing the scope for achieving common threat assessments among member states. This section suggests a more proactive approach to the communication of warning than what is generally advocated on the national level.

A warning can never be a substitute for the intellectual deliberations or anticipatory thinking of decisionmakers. It can be an aid to these processes. This needs to be considered by producers of warning. Acknowledging that judgements overlap is a crucial step in a more proactive communicative approach where so-called 'drop-by warnings' are avoided. It is worth recalling former National Intelligence Officer for Warning Mary McCarthy's words, 'warning is not simply sounding an alarm'.<sup>38</sup> Bearing in mind the number of actors involved in international organisations, the same thought processes are likely to be duplicated in a multitude of places, increasing the burden for multinational warner organisations. This even further accentuates the need of a more proactive communicative approach and calls for the subsequent point.

A more proactive communicative approach necessitates additional abilities among producers of warning. Just as high-quality warning analysts can be characterised as having a high degree of 'empathy' with the decisionmakers of the country they examine,<sup>39</sup> it also holds true that they need to be equally empathetic with regard to their own decisionmakers, whom they serve.<sup>40</sup> Being closely familiar with the decisionmaker would not only help the producer to foresee when a warning might be controversial, or indeed welcome, but would also promote an ability to customise warnings according to the specific consumer profile. An increased capacity to do this would promote receptivity as the warner to a higher extent could take into consideration factors that determine the outcome of decisionmakers' processing of information and judgement of threat. In a multinational setting, this would further imply an ability to remain flexible and target recipients individually. This appears more effective than a 'watered-down' warning constructed according to lowest common denominators and would serve the efforts to reach shared threat assessments better. In short, as Schwartz and Randall rightly put it, forecasting for decisionmakers is not only about

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38 McCarthy, Mary (2003), *Statement before the National Commission Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States 2003-10-14*, accessed 2009-01-20 on [www.globalsecurity.com](http://www.globalsecurity.com)

39 Stein (1993), pp. 371-373; Jervis (1994), p. 771

40 May, Ernest R. & Zelikow, Philip D., eds., (2006), *Dealing with Dictators: Dilemmas of U.S. Diplomacy and Intelligence Analysis, 1945-1990*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press), pp. 12-13

accuracy, it also ‘involves understanding the decisionmakers and how they process information; knowing their mind-set, what they perceive to be the risks ahead, and where they are confident about the future ...’.<sup>41</sup>

Starting with the first challenge, the influence of beliefs has been recognised by producers of intelligence and has entailed attempts of creating strategies for how to come to terms with it. Chan for example writes that the production process needs to be ‘anchored’ in the worldview of the intended recipient.<sup>42</sup> In their overview of several cases in the history of US foreign affairs that were characterised by difficulties in the relations between producers and consumers of intelligence, May and Zelikow explain in a similar vein how products in some cases were adapted to fit the incumbent president’s specific beliefs,<sup>43</sup> and they suggest a three-step approach to identify crucial assumptions and conceptions relevant to the intelligence product,<sup>44</sup> which is here slightly elaborated and adjusted to a multinational setting.

Firstly, there is a need to identify the content of beliefs and assumptions that underlie the different member states’ views with regard to the object of the warning. This can either be done on an ad hoc-basis or more systematically with the help of a belief system framework, such as the operational code construct.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, the producer should assess the strength and centrality of these beliefs. Are they deeply held and not likely to change or could they easily be overruled? Understanding and having an overview of the content and strength of relevant beliefs and assumption among recipients gives the possibility for two types of comparisons. The first is between the assumptions of one’s own product and the beliefs of the member states. Are there any discrepancies? If so, where do they lie and what strength and centrality do the concerned beliefs have? The second comparison is between the beliefs of the different recipients. Where do the discrepancies lie here? What beliefs are likely to be crucial stumbling blocks in the efforts to form common threat assessments? This would help knowing what beliefs that could be consequential for receptivity and that need to be considered in the warning process. Thirdly, producers should assess what facts that would be likely to either weaken or bolster the consequential beliefs and then search for these.

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41 Schwartz, Peter & Randall, Doug (2007), ‘Ahead of the Curve: Anticipating Strategic Surprise’, in Fukuyama, Francis, ed., *Blindside: How to Anticipate Forcing Events and Wild Cards in Global Politics*, (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press), p. 104

42 Chan (1979), p. 179

43 May & Zelikow (2006), pp. 137-165

44 May & Zelikow (2006), pp. 211-212, building on Neustadt, Richard E. & May, Ernest R. (1986), *Thinking in Time: The Use of History for Decision Makers*, (New York: The Free Press)

45 See e.g. Schafer, Mark & Walker, Stephen G., eds., (2006), *Beliefs and Leadership in World Politics: Methods and Applications of Operational Code Analysis*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan)

With regard to the second challenge, the approach is similar. Producers are helped by efforts to clarify what the policy inclinations of the recipients are and what options and interests that are at stake with regard to the object of the warning as well as their respective strength. These are then compared with the implied policy option of the warning. Where are the potential tensions and how serious might they be? Just as on the cognitive dimension, a comparison should also be made between the different member states in order to spot likely points of disagreement. Besides being more able to foresee challenges to receptivity and, on the multinational level, common threat assessments, having an understanding of these points would help the producer to provide an answer to the warning's crucially important 'so what'-question. That is, it facilitates putting the warning in a relevant political context, displaying issue-linkages and, and in some cases, pointing to value trade-offs that need to be considered.

At the same time, answering this question, and thereby putting the warning in a political context, entails dangers. The probably longest standing academic dispute in and around the US intelligence community refers to the perceived tension between relevance and objectivity in analytic products. Should the producer promote the former over the latter, then he or she risks letting subjective factors, such as beliefs and interests of the decisionmaker, taint the search for truth and hence endangering accuracy. Indeed, it is the same debate long ongoing over the relation between social science and policy. As the line between valid and non-valid politicisation often is blurred, intelligence officials traditionally argue that they need to play it safe and keep an adequate distance from the world of policy. On the other hand, critics of this position maintain that it does not matter however high accuracy a product has if it is discarded as irrelevant by the decisionmaker.

Recognising the potential dangers of non-valid politicisation, this paper, as displayed above, nonetheless leans towards relevance in the perceived trade-off. Bearing in mind the third feature of a warning – it implies action – in conjunction with the impact on threat judgement by decisionmakers' policy inclination as well as the tension that can arise between different recipients, producers need to take the perceived risk of decreased accuracy in order to mitigate the type of challenge here discussed. As the participants of a high-level workshop on the relation between intelligence and policy agreed on, while the risk must be recognised, 'the potential gains from keeping them [policymakers] in proximity provide ample justification for doing so', and the 'red line' between the two groups should rather be seen 'as a line *within* the

intelligence-policy relationship and not *between* the two'.<sup>46</sup> To quote Jack Davis: 'In short, better integration of intelligence into the policymaking process is needed'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Roundtable Report: Intelligence and Policy: The Evolving Relationship, 10 November 2003 at Georgetown University, Washington DC, Center for the Study of Intelligence (CIA), p. 13  
<sup>47</sup> Davis, Jack (2002), 'Improving CIA Analytic Performance: Analysts and the Policymaking Process', Occasional Papers, Vol 1, No 2, Sherman Kent Center for Intelligence Analysis, p. 2

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

As stated, the suggestions presented in this paper point to the need of a more proactive communicative approach to warning. Possibly, they could help producers to more clearly understand and take into account factors that shape decisionmakers' threat judgements on a given issue and hence promote an ability to customise warnings. However, a word of caution is necessary. This paper builds on the so-called orthodox school of thought within strategic surprise theory, which holds that the scope for increasing the success rate of warnings is only limited.<sup>48</sup> One needs to have realistic and modest expectations of what can be done.

In their review of a number of case studies drawn from the last century, orthodox scholars argue that the reasons why surprises occur have seldom been lack of threat indications or warnings. Rather, they are due to inherent pathologies in the warning-response process that negatively affect decisionmakers' receptivity. These pathologies are found in a range of different dimensions: bureaucratic-organisational, cognitive, political, contextual, the 'nature' of information and prediction etc.<sup>49</sup> Thus, high predictive accuracy is neither enough nor necessary to avoid warning failure: receptivity to warning is dependent on a wide range of other factors, and the likelihood of decision and action does not necessarily grow in tandem with the quality of the knowledge of the warner. This is not to say that all factors are present in every instance of surprise or that it is easy to know which is the prevalent: 'Some factors will be absent in some cases, and furthermore, the relative weight that should be assigned to factors which are present will vary from one case to another and will be difficult to determine with precision.'<sup>50</sup> However, the multiplicity of variables does mean, as orthodox scholars continuously assert, that failure to prevent surprises is to some degree inevitable.

The wide range of inherent factors facilitating surprise render efforts to improve the warning process – such as increased intelligence collection or organisational reform – of only marginal help. According to Betts and Jervis – two central orthodox scholars – this is supported by the fact that surprises

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48 See Kam (1988) for an overview of the Orthodox School

49 Betts, Richard K. (1989), 'Surprise, Scholasticism, and Strategy: Review of Ariel Levite's *Intelligence and Strategic Surprise* (New York: Columbia University Press)', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol 33, No 3, pp. 330-331

50 George, Alexander L. & Smoke, Richard (1974), *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practise*, (New York: Columbia University Press), p. 586

keep occurring despite all the efforts seen through history to prevent them.<sup>51</sup> Even on a more positive note, the expectations of orthodox scholars are low: '... at most they hope to reduce the phenomenon of surprise, not to do away with it.'<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, surprise is more likely in some instances, and less likely in others. Some actors are more prone to be influenced by warnings, some less. In short, the degree of receptivity will vary with the strength of the 'barriers' foreseen by the orthodox school.

What this paper suggests is that warners should proactively seek to 'weaken' the barriers. Although no 'silver bullets' exist, they benefit from engaging with and get to know the recipients of their products as far as possible. A strong familiarity with the diagnostic and prescriptive propensities of decisionmakers, i.e. what drive their judgements, will improve the production process and increase the chances of warnings being successful. In multinational settings such as the EU, this seems even more crucial as the consumer body is likely to represent a wider range of different propensities entailing varying receptivity. Foreknowledge about when and where member states are likely to be affected differently by warnings would help producers to promote common threat assessments, and by that help the EU to realise its growing ambition to play an active role in preventing armed conflict.

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51 See e.g. Betts, Richard K. (2002), 'Fixing Intelligence', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 81, No 1; Betts (2007), pp. 19-52; Jervis, Robert (2006), 'The Politics and Psychology of Intelligence and Intelligence Reform', *The Forum*, Vol 4, Issue 1  
52 Kam (1988), p. 215