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ARTICLES

Organizational Culture and US Intelligence Affairs

HAMILTON BEAN

ABSTRACT Both US intelligence officials and intelligence studies scholars claim that ‘organizational culture’ is a cause of ‘intelligence failure’ and the proper locus of post-9/11 intelligence reform efforts. This essay uses a postmodern perspective to demonstrate how the dominant discourse of ‘organizational culture’ shapes stakeholders’ understandings of accountability and what constitutes necessary, correct, or effective intelligence reform. By exploring institutional struggles over the meanings of ‘culture’ and ‘accountability’, this essay calls for reconsideration of the ways US intelligence officials and intelligence studies scholars talk about ‘organizational culture’ vis-à-vis post-9/11 intelligence reform.

Post-9/11 studies of US intelligence routinely attribute a cause of intelligence failure to the ‘dysfunctional’, ‘conflictual’, or ‘fragmented’ organizational cultures of US intelligence agencies.¹ These studies generally claim that

The author would like to thank Bryan C. Taylor for his guidance in the development of this article.
¹See Jeffery Cooper, *Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence 2005); Eric Dahlstrom, *Intelligence and Law Enforcement: Bridging the Cultural Divide* (Washington, DC: National War College 2003); Philip Davies, ‘Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure in Britain and the United States’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17 (2004) pp.495–520; Luis Garicano and Richard Posner, ‘Intelligence Reform Since 9/11: An Organizational Economics Perspective’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19/4 (2005) pp.151–70; Stephen Marrin, ‘At Arm’s Length or at the Elbow? Explaining the Distance between Analysts and Decisionmakers’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 20 (2007) pp.401–14; Garrett Jones, ‘It’s a Cultural Thing: Thoughts on a Troubled CIA’, *Orbis* 50 (2006) pp.23–40; Rob Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community: An Ethnographic Study* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence 2005); Gregory Treverton, ‘Terrorism, Intelligence and Law Enforcement: Learning the Right Lessons’, *Intelligence and National Security* 18/4 (2003) pp.121–40; Michael Turner, ‘A Distinctive U.S. Intelligence Identity’, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 17 (2004) pp.42–61; Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007).

differences between ‘law enforcement culture’ and ‘intelligence culture’ contribute to bureaucratic turf war and a lack of information sharing among agencies. As a result, numerous federal commissions and intelligence officials have identified ‘changing organizational culture’ as critical to post-9/11 US intelligence reform strategy.² For example, in 2004 the Information Sharing Environment (ISE) was established in order to create a ‘trusted information network’ and promote the sharing of information and intelligence among various agencies.³ Central to the ISE’s Implementation Plan is the development of what it calls a ‘culture of information sharing’. While the ISE’s Implementation Plan does not elaborate the characteristics of this ‘culture’, the plan nevertheless lists several potential mechanisms that officials might use in order to develop it, including: 1) monetary and non-monetary awards; 2) agency-wide recognition for those who develop an improved information sharing practice; 3) inclusion in internal newsletters of information sharing accomplishments and the tangible end benefits that resulted; 4) development of awareness materials; 5) establishment of an annual Federal award for fostering information sharing; and 6) sharing ‘best practices’ regarding effective ways to educate and motivate personnel.⁴ Similar to other organizations within the US intelligence community, the ISE depicts culture as a concrete and objective phenomenon that senior officials can influence through incentives in order to reduce the likelihood of intelligence failures stemming from insufficient information sharing.

This essay steps back from the questions of whether organizational culture is, in fact, a cause of intelligence failure and/or can be molded to improve information sharing and intelligence.⁵ The concern here is instead with what the *discourse* of ‘organizational culture’ allows intelligence officials to *do*

²The 9/11 Commission, *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (hereafter *9/11 Commission Report*) (New York: W.W. Norton 2004); House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Report of the Joint Inquiry into the Terrorist Attacks of September 11* (Washington, DC: GPO 2002); The Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, *Report to the President of the United States* (Washington, DC: GPO 2005); Michael McConnell, ‘Overhauling Intelligence’, *Foreign Affairs* 86/4 (2007) pp.49–58; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *National Intelligence Strategy of the United States Of America: Transformation through Integration and Innovation* (2005), <<http://www.dni.gov/publications/NISOctober2005.pdf>> (accessed 23 September 2007); Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *United States Intelligence Community 100 Day Plan for Integration and Collaboration* (2007), <<http://www.odni.gov/100-day-plan/100-day-plan.pdf>> (accessed 3 September 2007); Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *United States Intelligence Community 500 Day Plan for Integration and Collaboration* (2007), <<http://www.odni.gov/500-day-plan/500-day-plan.pdf>> (accessed 3 December 2007); John Redd, ‘Yes, We Do Have a Clue’, *Washington Post*, 13 July 2007, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/12/AR2007071201199.html>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

³See <<http://www.ise.gov/>>.

⁴*ISE Implementation Plan* (2006) p.84, <<http://www.ise.gov/>> (accessed 16 May 2008).

⁵Scholars interested in these questions should consult the literature cited in note 1 above.

vis-à-vis ongoing institutional reforms and accountability for 9/11. In other words, this essay examines how intelligence stakeholders' practices of talking and writing about organizational culture help 'rule in' and 'rule out' ways of conceptualizing, strategizing, and enacting reform. For example, in 2005 the CIA's Office of the Inspector General (IG) produced a still classified report entitled 'CIA Accountability with Respect to the 9/11 Attacks'.⁶ The IG's Report concluded that 'the Agency and its officers did not discharge their responsibilities in a satisfactory manner'.⁷ As a result, the IG recommended that the Director of the CIA establish an 'Accountability Board' comprised of individuals outside the Agency to 'review the performance of some individuals and assess their potential accountability'.⁸ The then-Director of the CIA, Porter Goss, rejected the IG's recommendation, arguing: 'Singling out . . . individuals would send the wrong message to our junior officers about taking risks.'⁹ In 2007, a law was passed that required the CIA to declassify portions of the IG's Report. The then-Director of the CIA, General Michael V. Hayden, however, again rejected the IG's recommendation, stating: 'As you will see, the Inspector General found no "silver bullet" that would have prevented the terror attacks of September 11th. There was, in the words of the summary, "no single point of failure"'.¹⁰ This essay argues that the apparent reasonableness of General Hayden's claim relies – at least in part – on a dominant institutional understanding of 'accountability' that positions 'organizational cultures' and 'systems' – not individuals – as the locus of failure.

This essay interprets the IG's Report as the latest manifestation of a 60-year-old institutional struggle over the meanings of accountability and the relationships between intelligence systems, cultures, and individuals.¹¹ The postmodern perspective developed in this essay denies that these meanings and relationships can ever be unequivocally 'fixed'; rather, the reasonableness or 'truth' of their meanings and relationships exists only in the struggle between competing values and interests.¹² In other words,

⁶CIA Office of the Inspector General, *Report on CIA Accountability with Respect to the 9/11 Attacks* (hereafter *IG Report*) (June 2005). Selected portions of the IG Report's Executive Summary were declassified in 2007. This material is available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/reports/Executive%20Summary_OIG%20Report.pdf> (accessed 1 February 2008).

⁷Ibid. p.vi.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Porter Goss, 'Statement on CIA Office of the Inspector General Report' (5 October 2005) n.p., <<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/press-releases-statements/press-release-archive-2005/pr10052005.html>> (accessed 1 February 2008).

¹⁰Michael Hayden, 'Director's Statement on the Release of the 9/11 IG Report Executive Summary' (21 August 2007) n.p., <<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/press-releases-statements/press-release-archive-2007/911-ig-report-summary.html>> (accessed 1 February 2008).

¹¹For an introduction to this controversy, see Loch Johnson, 'The CIA and the Question of Accountability', *Intelligence and National Security* 12/1 (1997) pp.178–200.

¹²Chris Barker, *Making Sense of Cultural Studies: Central Problems and Critical Debates* (London: Sage 2002) p.53.

stakeholders 'can only specify this or that discourse as being more or less useful and as having more or less desirable consequences in relation to our values and purposes'.¹³ Therefore, this essay does not assert that cultural forces or individual decisions will reveal the transcendent 'truth' concerning 9/11, nor does it necessarily argue that individuals *should* be held formally accountable for the 9/11 tragedy. Instead, this essay examines what intelligence reform stakeholders gain or lose by emphasizing particular conceptions of 'organizational culture' in the ways that they talk and write about intelligence reform. This essay argues that the current, dominant conception of 'organizational culture' within US intelligence discourse reifies culture, perpetuates a view of accountability that obscures questions of individual agency, and shapes stakeholders' understandings about what constitutes necessary, correct, or effective intelligence reform. Casting intelligence failure as a 'cultural' problem encourages top-down prescriptions for 'strengthening', 'unifying', and 'transforming' culture that organizational researchers have shown to be either temporarily effective, ineffective, or even counterproductive.¹⁴

This essay follows organizational theorist Sally Riad's provocative claim that dominant, taken-for-granted understandings of 'organizational culture' shape the conduct of both management practitioners and researchers and 'disciplines what can and cannot be said' about organizational culture.¹⁵ Drawing on Riad's argument, this essay demonstrates that officials overwhelmingly presume that 'organizational culture' is both a cause of intelligence failure and the proper locus of reform efforts. Intelligence studies scholars have sanctioned this presumption by avoiding alternative conceptions of 'organizational culture' that encourage more critical examination of the interconnections and distinctions between systemic forces and individual judgment and decisionmaking. Exploring 'organizational culture' through a postmodern lens thus contributes to possibilities for reconsidering post-9/11 intelligence reform strategies. Toward this end, this essay is structured as follows. The first section elaborates a postmodern theoretical perspective on 'organizational culture' drawn from recent scholarship that redefines what organizational culture *is* and *how* it can be studied.¹⁶ This theoretical perspective is subsequently used to explore how intelligence officials and

¹³Ibid. p.49.

¹⁴Joann Keyton, *Communication and Organizational Culture: A Key to Understanding Work Experiences* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2005); Gideon Kunda, *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press 2006); Joanne Martin, *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2002).

¹⁵Sally Riad, 'The Power of "Organizational Culture" as a Discursive Formation in Merger Integration', *Organization Studies* 26/10 (2005) p.1548.

¹⁶Galit Ailon-Souday and Gideon Kunda, 'The Local Selves of Global Workers: The Social Construction of National Identity in the Face of Organizational Globalization', *Organization Studies* 24 (2003) pp.1073-96; Ester Barinaga, "'Cultural Diversity" at Work: "National Culture" as a Discourse Organizing an International Project Group', *Human Relations* 60 (2007) pp.315-40; Riad, 'The Power of "Organizational Culture"'.

scholars have represented ‘organizational culture’ in the post-9/11 era. Here, this essay demonstrates how the dominant discourse of ‘organizational culture’ shapes the unfolding of intelligence reform by perpetuating a dichotomy that tends to hold ‘systems’ rather than ‘individuals’ accountable for intelligence failure. To support these claims, this essay draws on an array of institutional texts, the 9/11 Commission hearing transcripts and the Commission’s *Final Report*, numerous scholarly articles and books concerning 9/11 and intelligence, and the CIA IG’s Report concerning the Agency’s performance prior to the 9/11 attacks. These texts are selected because they usefully demonstrate how discussions of ‘cultures’, ‘systems’, and ‘accountability’ emerge in patterned ways to reveal a dominant discourse shaping the trajectory of post-9/11 intelligence reform. The essay concludes with a discussion of its implications for intelligence studies scholarship.

Postmodernism, Intelligence Studies, and ‘Organizational Culture’

‘Postmodernism’ is a term used in different ways by different speakers, and therefore cannot be easily summarized.¹⁷ In his 2002 essay ‘Towards Postmodern Intelligence’, Andrew Rathmell traces the emergence of the term ‘postmodern’ to the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, the term was used primarily to describe Western cultural developments in architecture, art, and music that eschewed ‘modernist’ rules and conventions and instead emphasized complexity, multiplicity, and ambiguity. The term was subsequently taken up within social theory during the 1970s and 1980s. Here, Rathmell distinguishes between ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’. Postmodernism, according to Rathmell, ‘challenges the privileging of the “objective” scientific method, arguing that “truth” is contextually dependent and culturally determined’.¹⁸ Philosophers associated with postmodernism including Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Lyotard have challenged the foundational assumptions of modern science including rationality, order, clarity, realism, truth, and progress.¹⁹ Postmodernity, by contrast, emphasizes the complex interactions among economic, political, and cultural processes that arose during the latter half of the twentieth century under the labels of ‘postindustrialism’, ‘post-Fordism’, and ‘globalization’.

Intelligence studies scholars Peter Gill and Mark Phythian claim that ‘[a]lthough postmodernism is not helpful to us [intelligence scholars and

¹⁷Bryan C. Taylor, ‘Postmodern Theory’ in Steve May and Dennis K. Mumby (eds.) *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2005) p.113.

¹⁸Andrew Rathmell, ‘Towards Postmodern Intelligence’, *Intelligence and National Security* 17 (2002) p.93.

¹⁹Joanne Martin, Peter Frost and Olivia O’Neill, ‘Organizational Culture: Beyond Struggles for Intellectual Dominance’ in Stewart R. Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, Thomas B. Lawrence and Walter R. Nord (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage 2006) p.741.

practitioners], we do need to pay attention to key elements of postmodernity as a description of the social and political conditions at the start of the twenty-first century, notably postindustrialism and globalization'.²⁰ However, this essay argues that postmodernism cannot be so easily dismissed. Specifically, Gill and Phythian's 'map' for theorizing and researching intelligence delineates the field in terms of historical dimensions, research elements, research foci, theoretical approaches, spatial dimensions, and research techniques.²¹ Within this map, 'organizational cultures' is explicitly listed as a preferred theoretical approach. Postmodernism has usefully informed the study of organizations (including organizational culture) for more than 20 years through engagement and critique of discourse, identity, meaning, 'master narratives', knowledge/power, and 'hyperreality'.²² As organizational culture theorists Joanne Martin, Peter Frost and Olivia O'Neill state: 'Postmodern analysis is useful to organizational culture researchers because it reveals false claims of certainty. It offers a textual approach to greater intellectual honesty. ... It uncovers insights hidden from view by accepted theories and methods.'²³ Thus, intelligence studies scholars risk overlooking an important and productive line of theorizing by dismissing postmodernism as convoluted and peculiar apparition.

What makes postmodernism and intelligence studies odd bedfellows is postmodernism's role in research compared to the role played by traditional social scientific approaches. As organizational theorists Mats Alvesson and Stanley Deetz note: '[Postmodernism] primarily serves to open up the indeterminacy that modern social science, everyday conceptions, routines and practices have closed off. The expected outcome is to produce dissensus rather than a new consensus.'²⁴ This essay evokes postmodernism by 'rereading' US intelligence community documents and intelligence studies scholarship to locate *questionable assumptions* and *suppressed perspectives*. The benefit of doing so, as communication studies scholar Bryan Taylor states, is that

[Postmodernism] reminds us that our knowledge and identities – all of the taken-for-granted elements of human *organization* – might have been, and might yet be, *otherwise*. These elements ... viewed as total, transcendent, or permanent, are suddenly *vulnerable* ... [and may be] 'problematized' – recovered for the purposes of interrogation, critique, and transformation.²⁵

²⁰Peter Gill and Mark Phythian, *Intelligence in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2006) p.25.

²¹Ibid. p.37.

²²Mats Alvesson and Stanley A. Deetz, 'Critical Theory and Postmodernism Approaches to Organizational Studies' in Clegg *et al.* (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, pp.255–83.

²³Martin *et al.*, 'Organizational Culture', p.742.

²⁴Alvesson and Deetz, 'Critical Theory and Postmodernism Approaches', p.271.

²⁵Taylor, 'Postmodern Theory', p.118.

Therefore, this essay does not attempt to prescribe a 'superior' path for intelligence reform, nor does it assert the one 'best' conception of organizational culture or accountability as these moves would be antithetical to the postmodern perspective employed in the essay. Rather, the 'success' or 'failure' of this essay hinges on whether the arguments made herein spur – even partially or temporarily – reconsideration of scholars' and practitioners' dominant, taken-for-granted understandings and uses of 'organizational culture' within intelligence reform discourse. In other words, this essay argues that all representations of 'culture' (including this essay's) are selective, partial, and *political* 'attempts to impose order and meaning'.²⁶ This does not mean that dominant representations are necessarily 'wrong'; nor does it mean, however, that all representations are equally useful. This essay downplays questions of 'right' or 'wrong' to instead explore *why, how, and with what consequences* certain conceptions of 'organizational culture' are currently used within intelligence discourse. The objective here is to explore how postmodern conceptions of culture might usefully contribute to reform debates. In order to accomplish this objective, this essay next elaborates a postmodern theoretical orientation toward 'organizational culture'.

Postmodernism and Organizational Culture

'Organizational culture' is an overarching term that both organizational members and scholars use to describe a range of organizational phenomena. As a theoretical concept, 'organizational culture' has fluctuated in popularity among management scholars and practitioners for more than 30 years.²⁷ Organizational members (often managers) may invoke culture in order to further goals related to improved organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This dominant 'functionalist' or 'problem-solving' perspective views culture as something the organization *has*, rather than something the organization *is*.²⁸ The ISE's Implementation Plan discussed in the introduction of this essay depicts 'culture' as something the organization *has*, i.e., a variable that senior managers can control through incentives to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. Those who study culture as something the organization *is* instead seek to understand how artifacts, practices, values, and beliefs – in written, spoken, material, spatial, temporal, and aesthetic manifestations – variously shape and emerge from the interactions of organizational members.²⁹ This 'interpretive' perspective does not necessarily shun the control-oriented and problem-solving impulses of functionalist research; it does, however, offer organizational members and scholars the opportunity to develop a deeper

²⁶Martin *et al.*, 'Organizational Culture', p.743.

²⁷Keyton, *Communication and Organizational Culture*.

²⁸Linda Smircich, 'Concepts of Culture and Organizational Analysis', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28 (1983) pp.339–58.

²⁹Martin, *Organizational Culture*.

understanding of how people make sense of their organizational environments, identities, and work practices.³⁰

Beyond functionalist and interpretative approaches are more critical and complex perspectives that focus on the interconnections between knowledge, power, and discourse that constitute the 'truth' of 'organizational culture'. Using a postmodern perspective elaborated below, this essay demonstrates that 'organizational culture' appears across a range of official documents, scholarly texts, and institutional sites that work together to establish the 'truth' of 'organizational culture' vis-à-vis intelligence. Specifically, within post-9/11 intelligence discourse, 'organizational culture' is depicted as both obstructing the formation of a 'unified', 'effective', and 'collaborative' US intelligence community, while simultaneously enabling the potential creation of that envisioned community.³¹ Within this discourse, 'parochial' subcultures are depicted as impeding collaboration and information sharing. As a result, establishing a 'culture of collaboration', a 'culture of information sharing', and a 'community-wide culture' are viewed as solutions to the problems associated with conflicting intelligence subcultures.³² A more integrated and collaborative intelligence community culture is depicted by scholars and practitioners as critical for reducing (yet not eliminating) the likelihood of future catastrophic intelligence failures. Here, both scholars and practitioners conceive of 'organizational culture' as a force that possesses causal, law-like effects that can be successfully isolated, measured, and managed. 'Organizational culture' is thus depicted as existing *prior to* the language that constructs and 'operationalizes' it.³³ A key task for scholars working from these premises becomes explicating the forms, features, and influence of 'cultural' phenomena – most often in the service of managerial goals and objectives.³⁴

A postmodern perspective, however, destabilizes this dominant understanding of 'organizational culture'. For Riad, 'organizational culture' is 'produced ... and only becomes salient within institutional and moral frameworks both academic and practitioner'.³⁵ In other words, the 'truth' of 'organizational culture' articulated by intelligence scholars and practitioners

³⁰Linda Putnam and Michael Pacanowsky (eds.), *Communication and Organization: An Interpretive Approach* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage 1983).

³¹See, e.g., Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *100 Day Plan for Integration and Collaboration*.

³²Martin, *Organizational Culture*; Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *100 Day Plan for Integration and Collaboration*; Program Manager, Information Sharing Environment, 'Speech Given before the DNI's Information Sharing Conference & Technology Exposition: Intelink and Beyond: Dare to Share', Denver, CO (2006), <http://www.ise.gov/docs/20060822_speech.pdf> (accessed 5 December 2007).

³³Keyton, *Communication and Organizational Culture*.

³⁴For an example of this type of scholarship within the field of Intelligence Studies, see, Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community*.

³⁵Riad, 'The Power of "Organizational Culture"', p.1532.

is maintained in relation to institutional power.³⁶ From this perspective, the goal of the researcher is to reveal the concrete *practices* of power as they are produced within and through language, as well as explore the *consequences* of those practices not just for elites, but for all stakeholders – especially those on the margins of debate.³⁷ This perspective rejects the premise that an objective and concrete ‘organizational culture’ exists prior to the language used to construct it. For example, organizational scholars Galit Ailon-Souday and Gideon Kunda argue that the concept of ‘national identity’ does not ‘merely imply the embodiment of a cognitively constraining cultural outlook . . . but is itself a flexible cultural creation into which people impute variable and fluctuating meaning’.³⁸ Similarly, in her study of ‘national culture’ as a discourse organizing an international project group, organizational scholar Ester Barinaga claims that:

[T]here is not such a thing as cultural diversity that influences group behavior; but rather discourses on and attitudes toward cultural diversity and hence toward those members who represent the discourse. The discourse on ‘cultural diversity’ hold [*sic*] by organizational actors seems to be far more relevant than the actual variety of their countries of origin.³⁹

Barinaga focuses on ‘national’ rather than ‘organizational’ culture, yet her insights concerning the relationship between ‘culture’ and ‘accountability’ support the argument developed in this essay. Specifically, the project group that Barinaga studied brought ‘national culture’ into speech as an ‘innocent excuse’ for misunderstandings.⁴⁰ ‘National culture’ is easy to accept, Barinaga states, because it ‘does not pinpoint any scapegoat’.⁴¹ This use of ‘national culture’ by the project group allowed members to conveniently ignore other causes of misunderstandings including differing educational backgrounds and training, unfamiliarity with the project, and personal (rather than ‘cultural’) interests. ‘Cultural’ discourse was brought into the group, Barinaga claims, ‘as the easiest excuse, since it provides a way around conflicts without blaming anyone. “National cultures” enter the language game of excusing, of finding a scapegoat to [*sic*] what is a potential conflict. . . . Blame is moved from particular group members to broadly accepted discourses.’⁴² Similarly, ‘organizational culture’ operates within US intelligence affairs in the way that Barinaga elucidates, i.e., by

³⁶Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon 1980).

³⁷Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ in T. Van Dijk (ed.) *Discourse as Social Interaction* (London: Sage 1997) pp.258–84.

³⁸Ailon-Souday and Kunda, ‘The Local Selves of Global Workers’, p.1075.

³⁹Barinaga, “‘Cultural Diversity’ at Work”, p.318.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* p.325.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.* p.326.

encouraging stakeholders to avoid blaming individuals and instead conveniently attribute ‘intelligence failure’ to intelligence agency systems and cultures. The next section of this essay describes how intelligence practitioners and scholars have imbued ‘organizational culture’ with a preferred understanding of the relationship between ‘systems’ and ‘accountability’.

‘Organizational Culture’, ‘Accountability’ and Intelligence Affairs

‘Organizational Culture’

Organizational theorist Joanne Martin claims that the mantra of ‘culture’ tends to rise in response to the latest organizational crisis.⁴³ Both 9/11 and the 2003 Iraq War were catalytic institutional crises within the US intelligence community and help to explain the resurgence of ‘culture’ as a central concern for both intelligence practitioners and scholars. For example, leading the agendas of the DNI’s *100 Day Plan* and *500 Day Plan* were efforts to establish a ‘culture of collaboration’ among the intelligence community’s agencies and stakeholders. Similarly, a goal of the intelligence community’s *Five Year Strategic Human Capital Plan* was to ‘create a culture of leadership at all levels’ by developing ‘a common ethos like the one that binds together those who wear the uniforms of our separate military services’.⁴⁴ The *Human Capital Plan* claimed: ‘Our Nation’s intelligence agencies must be united by a common IC culture, its own ethos of service, integrity, and accountability.’⁴⁵ The *National Intelligence Strategy of the United States of America* cited the need to ‘build an Intelligence Community-wide culture that values the abilities of each of its members and provides them developmental opportunities across the Intelligence Community in accord with their aptitudes and aspirations’.⁴⁶

Specific agencies have also identified ‘culture’ as an important focus of their strategic plans. The FBI’s *Strategic Plan, 2004–2009* stated: ‘Since 9/11, the FBI has ... shifted its counterterrorism culture and organization from reactive to proactive and “threat-based”’,⁴⁷ yet FBI officials claimed that improvements could still be made as the Bureau moved to implement ‘fundamental changes to its organizational culture and administrative processes’.⁴⁸ The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) in its *Strategic Plan 2007–2012* listed among its goals the creation of a ‘knowledge-based

⁴³Martin, *Organizational Culture*.

⁴⁴Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *The U.S. Intelligence Community’s Five Year Strategic Human Capital Plan: An Annex to the U.S. National Intelligence Strategy* (2006), <<http://www.fas.org/irp/dni/humancapital.pdf>> (accessed 3 December 2007), p.8.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶*National Intelligence Strategy of the United States*, p.14.

⁴⁷Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Strategic Plan, 2004–2009* (2004), <<http://www.fbi.gov/publications/strategicplan/strategicplanfull.pdf>> (accessed 3 December 2007) p.28.

⁴⁸Ibid. p.4.

culture',⁴⁹ a 'culture of continuous improvement',⁵⁰ an 'information sharing culture',⁵¹ and a 'culture of excellence'.⁵² For DIA, implementing strategies to 'discover, share, apply, and build' knowledge across the organization required 'introducing changes in culture, as well as processes and technology, to create multi-dimensional and mutually supporting approaches to improving knowledge development'.⁵³ The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) claimed in its *Intelligence Enterprise Strategic Plan* an intention to '[p]romote a culture that supports and rewards initiative, creativity, diversity, and professionalism'.⁵⁴ The CIA's *Strategic Intent 2007–2011* stated: 'Our common culture will be One Agency, One Community'⁵⁵ where 'goals are mutually shared and honored'.⁵⁶

These publicly available documents provide 'official' representations of 'organizational culture'. Admittedly, the overall import of these documents is uncertain. We also cannot conflate official representations of 'culture' with how organizational members *actually* make sense of and use the term.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, 'documents reflect certain kinds of organizational rationality at work. They often embody social rules – but not necessarily the reasoning behind the rules – that govern how members of a social collective should behave'.⁵⁸ In other words, as organizational theorist Mats Alvesson states: 'Corporate culture as an expression of power may be seen as taking the form of systematic efforts to establish a certain worldview, a particular set of values and/or emotions among corporate employees.'⁵⁹ From this perspective, official documents are not inconsequential in influencing members' understandings of the importance and role of 'organizational culture' within processes of reform.

When the DIA's *Strategic Plan* promotes cultures of 'knowledge', 'continuous improvement', 'information sharing', and 'excellence', readers may intuit that 'culture' is being used here as a 'buzzword'. Buzzwords can

⁴⁹Defense Intelligence Agency, *Strategic Plan 2007–2012: Leading the Defense Intelligence Enterprise* (2007), <http://www.dia.mil/thisisdia/2007-2012_DIA_Strategic_Plan.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2007) p.5.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid. p.14.

⁵²Ibid. p.23.

⁵³Ibid. p.17.

⁵⁴Department of Homeland Security, *DHS Intelligence Enterprise Strategic Plan* (2006), <<http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dhs/stratplan.pdf>> (accessed 3 December 2007) p.14.

⁵⁵Central Intelligence Agency, *Strategic Intent 2007–2011: One Agency. One Community* (2007), <https://www.cia.gov/about-cia/strategic_intent.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2007) p.2.

⁵⁶Ibid. p.9.

⁵⁷Kunda, *Engineering Culture*.

⁵⁸Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2002) p.117.

⁵⁹Mats Alvesson, 'Organizational Culture and Discourse' in David Grant, Cynthia Hardy, Cliff Oswick and Linda Putnam (eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse* (London: Sage 2004) p.322.

be either innocuous or dangerous. Postmodernism provides a theoretical perspective from which intelligence studies scholars can rigorously critique the dangerous and inappropriate use of buzzwords – an abundance of which, some might admit, can be found within intelligence discourse. Ideally, a postmodern perspective focuses attention on the historical, cultural, institutional, and power-laden dynamics of language, the processes of its dissemination, and the consequences of its use in specific contexts. A focus on official documents is, of course, only one approach to understanding the uses of language within intelligence affairs (yet it may be one of the most viable within this secretive institution). Alternative understandings of ‘organizational culture’ may be found by interviewing institutional members, as well as observing how certain conceptions of ‘culture’ are represented and enforced within specific organizational settings. Even though it is difficult to pinpoint causal connections between official discourse and member sensemaking and action, the documents noted above clearly point to the salience of ‘organizational culture’ as an element of reform discourse. An important question is why references to ‘organizational culture’ – rather than some other phenomenon – consistently appear across these official documents. Intelligence studies scholarship may be one reason.

Intelligence studies scholars have consistently advanced ‘organizational culture’ as a primary cause of both the 9/11 tragedy and institutional blunders in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War. For example, Philip Davies argues that US ‘intelligence failure’ is linked to a broad definition of intelligence and weak cultural norms and values of collegiality and consensus:

This confluence of two cultural trends leads to acute institutional balkanisation and weak inter-agency collaboration. ... Failures in the US system are most likely to result, therefore, from *inadequate* or *ineffective institutional integration*.⁶⁰

Davies claims that a lack of integration led to both the success of the 9/11 attacks and the Bush Administration’s ‘cherry picking’ of intelligence in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War. In the case of 9/11, the CIA did not share surveillance photographs or supporting contextual information with the FBI that may have alerted officials to the plot because CIA officials did not, as Amy Zegart explains, view sharing such information as part of their job.⁶¹ Zegart explains how misguided institutional structures, cultures, and incentives caused pre-9/11 US intelligence agency ‘adaptation failure’:

[P]oliticians and journalists have preferred to point fingers, focusing on who failed to do what and when. The result is a prevailing wisdom that mistakenly attributes the failures of September 11 to individuals.... [H]ighlighting the role of individuals is ... dangerous because it suggests

⁶⁰Davies, ‘Intelligence Culture and Intelligence Failure’, p.503 (emphasis original).

⁶¹Zegart, *Spying Blind*.

the wrong causes of failure and the wrong remedies to address them. ... What is missing from these accounts is a sense of context, the underlying constraints and forces that make it likely that talented people will make poor decisions. ... My point is not that individual leadership never matters, but that the harder-to-see aspects of organizational life – such as training, procedures, cultures, and agency structures – often matter more. ... Yes, individuals made mistakes, but it was the system that failed us.⁶²

Given these conditions, William Lahneman asserts: 'IC [intelligence community] personnel must come to view themselves as members of one group – the IC – rather than as staff members of their individual agencies. This view must reflect a common IC culture.'⁶³ By contrast, Jeffrey Cooper explains that each intelligence discipline remains a 'guild' that recruits, trains, and inculcates members in distinct 'rituals and arcana'.⁶⁴ This 'guild structure' and 'tradcrafft culture' builds on past practices but lacks a 'strong formal methodology' of a 'true discipline' and relies on the transmission of knowledge and expertise from experts to novices.⁶⁵ For Cooper, guild structure and tradcrafft culture need to be reinvigorated by bringing experts back into service to instruct and mentor new recruits. However, Rob Johnston's ethnographic study of 'analytic culture' concludes that reinvigorating 'tradcrafft' culture is misguided: 'The notion that intelligence operations involve tradcrafft, which I define as practiced skill in a trade or art, may be appropriate, but the analytic community's adoption of the concept to describe analysis and analytic methods is not.'⁶⁶

These analyses tend to leave the theoretical and empirical interconnections and indeterminacies between individuals, systems, and cultures largely unelaborated. These drivers are also arranged hierarchically within scholarly and institutional discourse, with 'culture' serving as the primary driver of 'systemic' failure. 9/11 Commission Chairman Thomas Kean and Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton have acknowledged public concerns regarding the adequacy of this configuration, yet nevertheless assert its correctness:

In the [9/11 Commission] report, we refer to the problem [failure] as 'systemic' because it was. Conversely, it is inaccurate to say our report holds nobody accountable, particularly at the senior levels of government. The names of all the top officials involved in counterterrorism are in the report – we make very clear the actions, decisions, and even deliberations of various officials. Once again, the reader is

⁶²Ibid. pp.6–10.

⁶³William Lahneman, 'Is a Revolution in Intelligence Affairs Occurring?', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 20 (2007) p.11.

⁶⁴Cooper, *Curing Analytic Pathologies*, p.6.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Johnston, *Analytic Culture in the U.S. Intelligence Community*, p.17.

capable of making a judgment about who he or she feels performed well, and who could have done better.⁶⁷

However, a handful of commentators, scholars, and stakeholders including Richard Falkenrath, the 9/11 families, Philip Shenon, Benjamin DeMott, and the CIA's IG have objected to what they perceive as the 'official' eliding of individual accountability.⁶⁸ Falkenrath states: 'The [9/11] commission's "failure of imagination" is more of a slogan than an argument: it sounds good but is an almost indecipherable muddle.'⁶⁹ Such sloganeering reflects, as Falkenrath states, 'a "no fault" theory of governmental behavior that is not only plainly incorrect but is repeatedly rebutted by the very fine history contained within the commission's report'.⁷⁰ By downplaying questions of individual agency, intelligence studies scholars have avoided the morally agonizing, politically incendiary, but potentially useful task of engaging the indistinct relationship between systemic and individual causes of intelligence failure. This lack of scrutiny serves institutional interests because officials understandably would like to continue to believe that 'organizational culture' can be a tool used for reducing the likelihood of intelligence failure by generating member commitment, efficiency, and effectiveness.⁷¹

However, this belief may be unfounded given that organizational scholars have consistently undermined the premise that there exists a linear, causal relationship between an abstraction called 'organizational culture' and organizational outcomes.⁷² In their recent review of 30 years' worth of organizational culture research, Martin, Frost, and O'Neill state that 'the oft-repeated claims of a link between "strong" integrated culture and organizational performance must be regarded as, at best, unproven, until longitudinal, well controlled studies, with in-depth generalist measures of culture across time, can be conducted'.⁷³ These authors concede, however, that the seductive promise of a 'strong' organizational

⁶⁷Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2006) p.276.

⁶⁸See Richard Falkenrath's response to Ernest May and Philip Zelikow in 'Sins of Commission? Falkenrath and His Critics', *International Security* 29/4 (2005) pp.208-11; Kristen Breitweiser, *Wake-up Call: The Political Education of a 9/11 Widow* (New York: Warner Books 2006); Philip Shenon, *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Investigation* (New York: Twelve 2008); Benjamin DeMott, 'Whitewash as Public Service: How the 9/11 Commission Report Defrauds the Nation', *Harper's Magazine*, October 2004, <<http://www.commondreams.org/views/04/11/13-28.htm>> (accessed 16 May 2008); *IG Report*.

⁶⁹Richard A. Falkenrath, 'The 9/11 Commission Report: A Review Essay', *International Security* 29/3 (2004/05) p.178.

⁷⁰Falkenrath, 'Sins of Commission', p.210.

⁷¹Martin *et al.*, 'Organizational Culture'.

⁷²Keyton, *Communication and Organizational Culture*; Kunda, *Engineering Culture*; Martin, *Organizational Culture*.

⁷³Martin *et al.*, 'Organizational Culture', p.729.

culture will likely endure despite 'the weaknesses of the empirical record'.⁷⁴ Organizational cultures once lauded for their 'unity', 'strength', and 'effectiveness' often find themselves targets for criticism when success evaporates.⁷⁵ Given these ambiguities, the ubiquity of 'organizational culture' within post-9/11 intelligence discourse can perhaps be attributed – at least in part – to this term's accommodation of an institutional perspective on accountability that emphasizes 'systems' – not individuals.

'Accountability'

In order to understand how current conceptions of 'organizational culture' tend to hold 'systems' rather than 'individuals' accountable for intelligence failure, it is useful to trace conflicting institutional meanings of 'accountability' to the aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In 1942, the Roberts Commission was established to ascertain 'whether any derelictions of duty or errors of judgment on the part of United States Army or Navy personnel contributed to such successes as were achieved by the enemy ... and, if so, what these derelictions or errors were, and who were responsible therefore'.⁷⁶ The Roberts Commission found that the commander in chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel, and the commander of the Army, Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, were guilty of dereliction of duty. Kimmel and Short were held formally accountable for the military's lack of preparedness for the Pearl Harbor attack according to institutionally-sanctioned standards of accountability circa 1942. These standards permitted failure to be attributable to the judgment and decisionmaking of individuals. Moreover, institutional norms at the time also required that commanding officers be dismissed even if their individual judgment and decisionmaking could not be unequivocally determined to be the principal cause of failure.⁷⁷

The Roberts Commission had been created more than a decade before a wave of systems-oriented theories began to engage the complex relationship between individuals and the large, interconnected organizations of which they were a part.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, the Roberts Commission sparked public debate concerning whether Kimmel and Short had been made scapegoats for systemic flaws originating in Washington, DC. One *New York Times* editorial in 1942 concluded matter-of-factly: 'The primary responsibility for the disaster at Pearl Harbor must rest where the report of the Roberts

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Kunda, *Engineering Culture*.

⁷⁶Report of the Commission Appointed by the President of the United States to Investigate and Report the Facts Relating to the Attack Made by Japanese Armed Forces Upon Pearl Harbor in the Territory of Hawaii on December 7, 1941, 77th Cong. (1942), <<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/roberts/roberts.html>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁷⁷The author thanks 'Reviewer #1' for this insight.

⁷⁸James March and Herbert Simon, *Organizations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1958).

Commission placed it – on the men in command at Hawaii itself.⁷⁹ Others, however, wondered whether blaming individuals was appropriate; another editorial stated: ‘It would be a serious mistake to assume, certainly, that the mere removal of a few men ... from their posts ... can itself cure some of the more basic evils which the [Roberts Commission] report implies. ... Clearly, General Short’s and Admiral Kimmel’s superiors in Washington were responsible for tolerating a *system* which did not encourage or compel cooperation.’⁸⁰ In 1999, the US Senate endorsed the view that Kimmel and Short had been scapegoats by passing a non-binding resolution exonerating the two men and restoring their wartime ranks, arguing that they ‘were not provided necessary and critical intelligence that was available’.⁸¹ President Bush, however, did not act on the Senate’s recommendation.⁸²

By the time the 9/11 Commission was established in 2002, cultural and institutional standards of accountability had shifted considerably. The 9/11 Commission’s leadership (Chairman Thomas Kean, Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton, and Executive Director Philip Zelikow) agreed: ‘The Pearl Harbor inquiries were perceived as partisan – intent on finding individuals to blame, and not looking at the flaws across the government that enabled the attack to take place. ... We would not miss the forest for the trees in the 9/11 story by looking solely for individuals to blame.’⁸³ Unlike the Roberts Commission, the 9/11 Commission’s charter did not contain explicit language directing it to identify ‘errors of judgment’ or ‘who were responsible’. The Commission’s hearings and *Final Report* downplayed debate about whether the actions of specific government officials inadvertently contributed to the catastrophe; as stated in the *Final Report*’s preface: ‘Our aim has not been to assign individual blame, our aim has been to provide the fullest account possible of the events surrounding 9/11 and to identify lessons learned.’⁸⁴

During the Commission’s 26 January 2004 public hearing, Executive Director Zelikow accounted for the failure of officials to place 9/11 conspirators Nawaf al Hazmi, Salem al Hazmi, and Khalid al Mihdhar on a terrorist watchlist. Zelikow stated that the officials responsible for adding the names did not see it as an ‘integral part of their work’.⁸⁵ In an

⁷⁹‘The Chain of Responsibility’, *New York Times*, 28 January 1942, p.A18.

⁸⁰‘The Report on Pearl Harbor’, *New York Times*, 26 January 1942, p.A14 (emphasis added).

⁸¹H.R. 3050. To Provide For the Posthumous Advancement of Rear Admiral (Retired) Husband E. Kimmel and Major General (Retired) Walter C. Short on the Retired Lists of Their Respective Services, 106th Cong. (1999).

⁸²Adm. Kimmel’s grandson, Tom Kimmel, maintains a website dedicated to the ‘vindication’ of Adm. Kimmel and Gen. Short, and the Kimmel family continues to advocate for posthumously nominating Kimmel and Short for retirement at their highest wartime ranks.

⁸³Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, p.30.

⁸⁴*9/11 Commission Report*, p.xvi.

⁸⁵Public Hearing, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (26 January 2004), p.77, <<http://www.9-11commission.gov>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

argument similar to Zegart's, Zelikow concluded that 'the watchlisting label... distorts the analysis of accountability. It tends to cast a harsh light on whether one or two people at headquarters did their job. That focus may be unfair. It certainly is too narrow.'⁸⁶ Vice Chairman Hamilton affirmed Zelikow's logic: 'There is no single individual who is responsible for this failure. Yet individuals... are not absolved of responsibility. Any person in a senior position within our government during this time bears some element of responsibility for the government's actions.'⁸⁷ Zelikow and Hamilton's statements underscore that within 60 years, dominant understandings of intelligence failure had shifted from scrutinizing individual judgment and decisionmaking to focusing on systemic, institutional flaws.

However, not everyone shared the Commission's preferred framing. During the Commission's fourth public hearing on 14 October 2003, Commissioner Max Cleland asked a panel of former CIA officials, 'Who is responsible for warning this country of an attack on this nation, and who's accountable?'⁸⁸ Mary McCarthy, a former National Intelligence Officer for Warning, responded: 'As far as who is accountable, I think that's what the Commission is discovering, and hopefully what we will discover is that our systems were not adequate.'⁸⁹ McCarthy's statement epitomizes an institutional environment where the locus of accountability has shifted from individuals to an institutionally acceptable discourse of systems and cultures. Nevertheless, several of the 9/11 victims' families' groups rejected the logic that complex mistakes surrounding the attacks precluded holding individuals to account. For example, Stephen Push of the group 'Families of September 11' testified during the 9/11 Commission's first public hearing:

I think this Commission should point fingers. I'm not suggesting that you find scapegoats someone to hang out to dry, but there were people, people in responsible positions, who failed us on 9/11. They didn't just fail us once. 9/11 occurred because they were failing us over a long period of time. Some of these people are still in responsible positions in the government; perhaps they shouldn't be, and that's one of the things I think you need to look at and think about.⁹⁰

Push's fellow panelists shared his sentiments. Mary Fetchet stated: 'For the sake of our children, we feel a great sense of urgency. What were the failures? Who was accountable?'⁹¹ and Mindy Kleinberg of September 11th Advocates testified, 'If at some point we don't look to hold the individuals

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Kean and Hamilton, *Without Precedent*, p.303.

⁸⁸Public Hearing, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (14 October 2003), p.56, <<http://www.9-11commission.gov>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Public Hearing, National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (31 March 2003), p.168, <<http://www.9-11commission.gov>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁹¹Ibid. p.176.

accountable for not doing their jobs properly then how can we ever expect for terrorists not to get lucky again?’⁹² For these witnesses, both *systems* and *individuals* could be held accountable. However, due to the Commission’s fear of being accused of ‘scapegoating’ and appearing too ‘partisan’, there was no acknowledgement of the substance or implications of the family members’ requested framing of accountability for 9/11.⁹³ The outcome of the 9/11 Commission raises two pertinent questions for intelligence studies scholars: 1) under what conditions can and should individual officials be held accountable for intelligence failure? And 2) has the establishment of the DNI inadvertently created the opportunity to satisfy cultural impulses to assign specific blame? In other words, will blame be assigned to the DNI after the next catastrophic intelligence failure? To help answer these questions, it may be useful to examine how the leadership of the CIA has approached questions of accountability for 9/11.

‘Organizational Culture’ Intersects ‘Accountability’ for 9/11 at CIA

The CIA defines its organizational culture in terms of ‘integrity’, ‘teamwork’, ‘total participation’, ‘innovation’, ‘adaptation’, ‘accountability’, and ‘continuous improvement’.⁹⁴ Under ‘accountability’, the CIA’s website states: ‘We must take responsibility for our actions and decisions. This is part of integrity as a group and as individuals.’⁹⁵ In his Senate confirmation hearing as CIA Director, General Hayden stated that he would ‘reaffirm CIA’s proud culture of risk-taking and excellence’.⁹⁶ In his testimony, General Hayden later acknowledged the difficulty of creating both a ‘culture of excellence’ and a ‘culture of accountability’:

Everyone has recommended risk-taking, and we’ve also talked in a healthy dialogue about accountability. And you need both, and clearly you must hold people accountable for wrongdoing. But do you see the leadership challenge in terms of getting both a culture of risk-taking and a culture of accountability in the same place? [...] We’ll have both, Senator, but we’ll probably have long dialogue with the members of the committee as to how best to balance two things that we both desperately need.⁹⁷

⁹²Ibid. p.202.

⁹³Kirsten Lundberg, ‘Piloting a Bipartisan Ship: Strategies and Tactics of the 9/11 Commission’, Kennedy School of Government Case Program, C15-05-1813.0 (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College 2005).

⁹⁴Central Intelligence Agency, ‘Our Culture’ (2005), <<https://www.cia.gov/careers/life-at-cia/our-culture.html>> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, ‘Hearing on the Nomination of General Michael V. Hayden to be the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (2006), p.11, <http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2006_hr/051806transcript.pdf> (accessed 3 December 2007).

⁹⁷Ibid. pp.132–3.

After being confirmed as CIA Director in 2006, General Hayden consistently avoided addressing issues of individual accountability. His most explicit rejection of individual accountability for 9/11 followed the public release of portions of the IG's Report in 2007 concerning the CIA's performance prior to the 9/11 attacks. The Report states:

[I]ndividuals did not perform their duties in a satisfactory manner; that is, they did not – with regard to the specific issue or issues discussed – act ‘in accordance with a reasonable level of professionalism, skill, and diligence’, as required by Agency regulation. . . . Where the Team found systemic failures, it has recommended that an Accountability Board assess the performance and accountability of those managers who, by virtue of their position and authorities, might reasonably have been expected to oversee and correct the process. *In general, the fact that failures were systemic should not absolve responsible officials from accountability.*⁹⁸

Mirroring the 9/11 families' argument, the IG rejected the false dichotomy between holding *either* systems *or* individuals accountable. In another parallel to the 9/11 Commission, General Hayden simply ignored the substance and implications of the IG's framing of accountability, stating in a press release accompanying the Report:

[O]ur colleagues referred to in the document, and others who have read it, took strong exception to its focus, methodology, and conclusions. In October 2005, Director Goss declined to accept its primary recommendation – the creation of an Accountability Board – to consider disciplinary action against a handful of individuals at different levels of command. I have re-read the report, carefully evaluated what it says, and have found no reason to revisit his decision. . . . As you will see, the Inspector General found no ‘silver bullet’ that would have prevented the terror attacks of September 11th. There was, in the words of the summary, ‘no single point of failure.’ . . . [the CIA did not] wait for this formal review to begin identifying and correcting the systemic flaws discussed in the report.⁹⁹

What were the ‘systemic flaws’ that the CIA sought to correct? As this essay has demonstrated, part of the answer is ‘culture’. The lack of public debate concerning General Hayden's rejection of the IG's recommendation stems in part from the naturalization of ‘organizational culture’ as a plausible – and indeed desirable – alternative to blaming individuals for failure. ‘Systems’ and ‘cultures’ work as synonyms to bolster a preferred framing of accountability. General Hayden simply reasserted the self-evident ‘truth’ of the relationships between these concepts – a ‘truth’ that most

⁹⁸IG Report, p.vi (emphasis added).

⁹⁹Hayden, ‘Director's Statement’, n.p.

intelligence officials, policymakers, and scholars have been content to perpetuate.

Conclusion

This essay reinterprets intelligence discourse as a 60-year-old struggle concerning the meanings and relationships between ‘accountability’, ‘systems’, and ‘cultures’. In analyzing the features of the dominant discourse of ‘organizational culture’, the essay has tried to explain why stakeholders seeking individual accountability for 9/11 – rightly or wrongly – continue to face extreme odds in establishing their preferred frame. Intelligence orthodoxy currently holds that ‘organizational culture’ serves as a primary cause of intelligence failure and the proper locus of reform efforts. Here, failure is conceived of as a ‘system-wide’ phenomenon – not one attributable to the concrete decisions of specific officials at a given time and place. However, officials’ repeated assertions that there is ‘no single point of failure’ for 9/11 mystifies, distorts, and polarizes debate concerning systemic and individual causality, thereby limiting public understanding about what may constitute necessary, correct, or effective intelligence reform. As a result, defining post-9/11 intelligence reform as a ‘cultural’ problem reifies culture, leading to top-down prescriptions for ‘strengthening’, ‘unifying’, or ‘transforming’ culture – the ultimate benefits and consequences of which are still not well understood by scholars. In reviewing why and how certain conceptions of ‘organizational culture’ have come to dominate US intelligence discourse, this essay calls on intelligence studies scholars to reexamine the ways they talk and write about ‘organizational culture’. The current ‘truth’ of ‘organizational culture’ has enabled intelligence officials to use the term to address a range of public relations issues far removed from reform’s ostensible goal of changing the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of institutional members. Intelligence studies scholars and practitioners might transform this condition by questioning the dominant conception of ‘organizational culture’ within US intelligence discourse, thereby focusing needed attention on the *contingency* of the concept’s meaning, as well as the *politics* of its use.