

HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND SECURITY

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Abstract: *Topics regarding national security are increasingly present in scientific and public space and lately they are characterized by the multiplication of its analyzed dimensions. Intelligence analysis has also become an important area of these approaches and variables that influence its products are considered more and more. In this article we emphasize how important is for intelligence analysts to acknowledge their subjectivity and also we underline the impact that human subjectivity can have on analytical process. To reveal such a premise of human subjectivity we will analyze the history of theories addressing man as a rational agent (borrowed from economics) and the failure suffered by these theories. We will also highlight several dimensions for the manifestation of subjectivity in the analytical process and also some ideas regarding the limitation of their effects.*

Keywords: *subjectivity, intelligence analysis, security, community welfare*

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of security has become increasingly present in a world where the desire to maintain prosperity represents a fundamental requirement for an extreme low percentage of people, and a survival imperative desire for others. Studies on this topic have multiplied, and the directions of research of the phenomenon have been gradually extended to branches of other disciplines, ostensibly independent, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, political sciences, communication, etc. Information analysis is one of these branches, but more spectacular than others because this process is involved in dealing with any data and information from different scientific areas, but especially in decision-making processes of strategic security.

Analysis of information can acquire crucial importance both from a scientific and pragmatic perspective, especially when its results are prerequisites of the decisions for national security. Therefore, in this paper we have chosen to refer to intelligence analysis as a complex process of transformation of the data and information obtained through the collection of data using a range of specific tools and methods, which produces national security intelligence, able to serve in the decision-making process. Intelligence analysis leads to the production of national security information, following to specialized activities like searching, identifying, acquiring, processing of data related to indicators of threat (dysfunctions,

vulnerabilities, risk factors, risk status etc.) or threats to national values and interests, characterized by: (1). Relevance for national security (it refers to a threat, a threat to national security or to an opportunity to promote security interests) and (2). Novelty in relation to pre-existing data.

To ensure the accuracy of the analytic process, in the literature there are numerous references to rules that should be observed by analysts. Still, is it correct to question the real objectivity of intelligence analysis when all these procedures are followed? Is it fair to rely on rationality? Or is it necessary to accept a degree of analysts' subjectivity that will affect the outcome of their activities? Although the issue of rationality has been an important subject of analysis for philosophy, sociology, economics, the findings within these areas of study were insignificantly transferred to the field of security and intelligence.

2. PHILOSOPHIC RATIONALISM

As opposed to reason, rationalism, as understood in philosophy, means the sum of the currents that assigns primacy of reason and knowledge in guiding human behavior. Descartes is considered the founder of modern rationalism. In his works, *Rules for the direction of the mind* and *Discourse on Method* excluded from philosophic knowledge all probable knowledge or those legitimated by the principle of religious, moral, political or historical authority. The 18th century

was a culmination of respect shown towards the mathematical method, in particular Euclidian one taken from the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes and Spinoza (whose *Ethics* is intended to be demonstrated with Geometry methods). However, Hobbes insisted on the conventional and artificial nature of scientific knowledge.

Nondogmatic rationalism is an approach whereby the rationale holds primacy, but this idea is not a scientific dogma, because the superiority of reason is associated with awareness of its limits. Voltaire (1766) wrote *The Ignorant Philosopher* where he assumes the Socratic principle "I know that I don't know" saying

In spite of this continuous despair, however, I am always seeking knowledge of certain things, and my curiosity remains forever unabated.

At his turn, D. Diderot (1762) in *Addition to philosophical thought* compared reason to a little light in a sea of darkness, saying he feels as if he "wandered at night in a huge forest, having only a candle to guide me" (*apud EFSU*, 2004:901). Karl Popper was the one who turned the consciousness of the human fallibility in critical modern rationalism. From his point of view in order to gain knowledge it is not necessary to have a method, as classic rationalism had required, being more important to have the ability to learn from your own critical ideas and from the conditions for increasing knowledge. Thus, theories can be important only because of the results of trying their rejection. From the perspective of critical rationalism any form of dogmatism, even a rational-based one is, in fact, irrationalism. Therefore, it is necessary to "reject all the assumptions that are not supported by arguments or experience" (Popper, 1934/1981). Thus, critical rationalism tries to identify and eliminate errors, their progressive disclosure being the path to truth, even more than demonstration.

3. RATIONALISM IN ECONOMY

Economy was, at its turn, a science deeply interested in human rationality, as an ability to build a structural, procedural model for surrounding area, and also to use that model to identify, evaluate and resolve dependencies to environment through transformation or evaluating activities.

The most common references to human rationality in economy are the concept of *homo economicus*, who is that individual who tries to

achieve his very specific goals with the lowest costs. However, only the naive application of the *homo economicus* model argue that this hypothetical individual knows what is best for his physical and mental health over the long term to make the right decision for himself.

The history of the term *homo economicus* is suggestive for its scientific saga. Although it was used in the nineteenth century, the term was associated with specific eighteenth-century theories of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, who refer to personal selfishness as evidenced by references like

we do not expect dinner from the grocer' or brewer' magnanimity, but from pursuing their own interest (Smith, 1776).

In the late nineteenth century, Francis Edgeworth, William Stanley Jevons, Léon Walras, Vilfredo Pareto suggested mathematical models that allow rational understanding of human behavior. In the 20th century, Lionel Robbins refers to the term *economic man* having the meaning of the person who behaves rationally on the basis of knowledge involving his personal interests and his desire for welfare. Subsequently, even economists (Thorstein Verblen, John Maynard Keynes, Herbert Simon) have criticized the theory of rational human, identifying children and limited rationality in economic decision-making as variable that prevents correct macroeconomic forecast.

Research of Danny Kahneman and Amos Tversky have questioned assumptions such as the fact that people tend to decide so as to maximize their expected utility in accordance with the calculation of probabilities, showing that the probabilistic judgements are based on different heuristics which lead to cognitive errors (Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, 1982; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) and showing how people combine risk of losing and chance of winning in decision-making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). For example, Kahneman and Tversky describe investors who are prone to risk when the loss seems inevitable (not selling when they're at a loss, hoping for a return of quotes, for example) and aversion to risk when the gain has a high probability (investors prefer a smaller, but safer gain). Such a theory emphasizes the impossibility of using rationality of social actors in landmarks for prognosis as they do not always act for the maximization of individual profits. Although rationality theories enjoyed a long time of

scientific monopole and they were transferred to other areas, their initial meanings suffered important transformations.

4. RATIONALISM IN PSYCHOSOCIOLOGY

In sociology, rationalism is that human feature that makes individual behaviors predictable. Weber studied this subject and introduced the concept of rationalization in connection with mass and industrial society, as the process by which society institutionalizes those types of behavior that brought desired results through the use of the minimum possible means (e.g. bureaucracy). Reasoning was also cherished by Frankfurt School (M. Horkheimer, Th. Adorno), which considers that instrumental rationality is a form of domination and manipulation of reality. The same with a dictator against the people, the scientist knows things only when he can handle them. This conception was revised by Habermas, who introduced the paradigm of social rationalism (Habermas, 1981).

Rational choice theory can be summed up by applying economic methods in contexts which are normally subjected to other disciplines. Therefore, using rational choice theory scientists tried to explain the functioning of various social institutions as determined by the interests of the person (Douglass North, 1990), various macro phenomena through micro choices (James Coleman, 1990). Also, the contemporary theory of rational choice was followed by development of the game theory from John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, it allowed the demonstration that individual preferences are not cumulated in collective preferences or it explains political participation. An essential element of rational choice theory is that it assumes the intentionality, and this is the main difference from a pure Bayesian rationalism (Borgatta i Montgomery, 2000: 2335).

Sociologist rationalist theories were very successful particularly in the twentieth century, but declined from the introduction of the welfare state and economic paradigm. J Habermas (1981) proposes a new approach in his book *The theory of communicative action* - social communicative rationality. For him, technical or instrumental approach is not prioritized anymore, more important being the rationality of the best argument that comes up in the communication between social actors. In this way contents are accepted or rejected, while none of them have been

a priori better. Therefore social rationalism is more context-dependent than goal-dependent. Like this a major mutation occurs in rationalistic theories, as reason becomes relative, depending on the actors and contexts. Studies also describe situations when decisions are made irrationally, when people are more sensitive to short-term goals at the expense of long-term objectives, at the cost of significant internal conflicts that resulted in inconsistency, psychological paralysis, neurosis and / or mental pain. Ralf Dahrendorf (1958) conceptualized the term *Homo sociologicus*, to highlight the fact that many sociological models attempt to limit the power of social forces that determine individual choices and social values. Still, unlike the economic man, *homo sociologicus* is not pursuing his personal interest, but achieving social roles.

5. COGNITIVE ERRORS AND INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS

While polemics on rationality and its limited nature captured the interest of researchers for a long time, philosopher Jonathan Cohen (1981) shows that experiments have never proved that man is irrational and this view became a landmark of the area. Stanovich (1999, 2009) attacked his position underlining the role of alternative constructs and alternative rules in decision-making and Oaksford and Chater (1998, 2007) have considered that people are rational only confronted with a Bayesian perspective.

In his seminal work *Discourse on Method*, Descartes said:

The ability to judge right and to distinguish truth from falsehood, which is precisely what is called common sense or reason, is found in natural form, equally in all men; therefore, our opinions inequality does not stem from the fact that some are more rational than others, but only that we lead our thoughts on various ways and that we don't consider the same things. It is not enough to have a healthy mind, the important thing is to apply it well (*apud EFSU*, 2004:902).

Some of the problems that may arise in data analysis originate from specific human mental processes. This is because data analysis is a mental process itself thus it is subjected to bias and limits related to human psychology. New researches in psychology even sustains that, most of the time, individuals have no conscious experience of most of the things happening in the human mind. A lot of functions or mental processes associated with

perception, memory and information processing are conducted prior to and independent of any conscious reasoning. Thus what appears spontaneously in consciousness is the result of thought, not the thought process itself.

Stereotypes, expectations, prejudices, cognitive laziness, mental sets, previous experience work as active filters for decoding and interpretation of reality. Their implications for intelligence analysis derives from a lot of contextual factors such as the fact that reality is not directly described by the observer, but there are a number of links in the chain of communication to writing information inside intelligence, which determines the quantity and quality of incoming message deformation in the flow of information. A central point of this exercise is to explain the role of the observer in determining what is observed and how it is interpreted. People construct their own version of "reality" based on information provided by their senses, but this version is mediated by complex mental processes that determine which information are considered, how they are organized and the meaning attributed to them. What people perceive, how long it takes them to perceive that thing and how they process this information after they received them are all strongly influenced by past experience, education, cultural values, role requirements, organizational rules and also the particularities information it receives.

The first question which arises: is there any reality *per se*? According to the thesis of the social construction of reality, we can admit the existence of reality or, more precisely, of a world which consists of several realities. Initiated before, but coherently articulated in the writings of P. Berger and T. Luckman (1966), the theory sustains the inability of individuals to know the world "as it is", but only on the basis of what is said about it. In other words, the human universe of meanings is built and rebuilt by his actors inside and through all the changes between them. Thus, individuals "translate" their reality in their own terms or in "suitable" terms, according to ideological or symbolic filters involved in knowledge. This process can be assimilated to viewing environment wearing glasses that can distort that "landscape". In the same way, language is a tool that reflects an independent object (reality) but is also a resource that lends us new forms of our world. Moreover, the assumption that representation does not reflect the world, but it is constructing it is supported by the following assumptions (Barker, 2000:173): meanings are generated in relation to other

signifiers rather than to fixed objects. According to the semiotic theory, the meaning is produced by differentiating relationships (e.g. "good" understood as opposed to "bad"); the relationship between signifier and signified is not immutable; language doubles any representation of the world; language is relational: words generate meaning not only by reference to certain characteristics of an object, but to the network of relations of the language in use; every word contains echoes or traces of other meanings related in various contexts, which implies that the meaning is constantly changing.

Evaluation and cognition processes are seconded by general cognitive schemes, by categorization and attribution. The concept of "cognitive schema" is essential to develop a coherent theory regarding building, understanding and interpretation of social reality. Cognitive schemes are relatively stable algorithm-based ways of processing, organization and storage of information, characterized by generality and hierarchical organization with well-defined functionality for physical activity and related behaviors. An important cognitive scheme is the one of accessibility of information and it explains recurring situations where individuals have assessments and judgments about people and situations, without being able to objectively review all the available data relevant to the case (as it scientists does). Consequently, most often, it is considered the most accessible information, with all the inherent risks: information may not be necessary or relevant to the situation, which betrays the shallowness or cognitive laziness.

"False consensus" bias relates to the individual need to support the mental attitudes, opinions or actions that determines the development of attribution judgments that can create the illusion of a false consensus: individuals assign to others the same preferences, attitudes, opinions, so ones behavior in a special situation does not contradict the behavior of others in a similar situation. Although individuals do not have objective data to confirm their hypothesis, they consider their own behavior as relatively normal, under the belief that, in a similar situation, many others would behave in a similar way.

Another relevant cognitive scheme for the way we construct reality is the *halo effect*, according to which individuals extrapolate what is known, poignant and meaningful to previous behaviors of subjects when they assess and attribute causes on behaviors in other contexts. The halo which

sometimes appears around people is likely to significantly affect the objective assessments of the real context one. Halo effect is an unlawful and inappropriate extrapolation of assessment of a sphere of personal behaviors on contexts which, objectively, are not related with the same level of quality. Equally, *the need for coherence and cognitive balance* determines the selection of that information confirming the initial assumptions, also conceptualized as *the confirmation of the hypothesis*. Based on previous experience, each subject has cognitive and evaluative schemes and he tends to apply them in the current activity. Subsequently, the available information will be unconsciously selected or modified to confirm the hypothesis adopted.

Cognitive schemes are functionally inertial: they are activated during previous sequences extending their influence on the subsequent sequence, even if the two sequences are not as similar as to justify the operational continuity of the same scheme. This *effect of prior activation* may considerably affect individual mood and attitudes but also the intellectual predisposition to judge events that are succeeding in a certain way. Also, individuals tend to spontaneously adopt attitudes considered normal by their group, being a part of social consensus. The social conventions are adopted as operating schemas and people uses them to assess promptly everyday situations, freeing thinking of a futile effort.

Based on categories that provide maximum information about the world with a minimum of reflection, the individual interprets and attributes meanings to contexts associating contents with stereotyped and labels of a category. A category is not a representation of reality, but a construction of it, in the sense that categorical structure fundamentally depends on the objectives and individual knowledge (Shweder, 1977, *apud* Leyens and Bourhis, 1997:72). The concept of categorization designates cognitive activity which consists in including in the same class all the objects or persons of the same kind. As a cognitive activity indispensable for functional roles in society, categorization allows the organization of items based on a single criterion. The personal experience is structured in order to make sense and allows interpretation of acquired data. The saved time and effort allow the individual adaptation to the surrounding reality. However, organizing data into classes according to the principle of economy of effort facilitates an easier access to further information received from the environment.

Many theorists consider that categorization is an involuntary process that works automatically without conscious involvement of the subject. Activated category not only has the effect of subject awareness of belonging to one category or another, but it brings to attention the full amount of existing knowledge synthesized into schemas, prototypes or stereotypes. Activated schemes are cognitive structures, where positive and negative attributes are arranged in clusters.

One's own opinions are neither good nor bad, they are inevitable. "There is some truth in the maxim, indeed dangerous, that an open mind is a blank mind" (Betts, 1978, *apud* Heuer, 1999, 10). Therefore, analysts do not make an objective analysis by avoiding preconceptions; it denotes ignorance. Objectivity is obtained by basic assumptions, but reasonable reasoning allows the assessment of the validity of judgments themselves.

The analytical mental model is determined to a large extent by memory and also by processes occurring inside it (Eysenck, 2001). As processing data for intelligence decisions involves working with a large number of information, the analytical process is affected by what we remember or forget (Heuer, 1999:41). Previous knowledge and experiences determine the schemes used to generate hypotheses. Also, the ability to remember patterns on which to correlate data with each other is also an important variable affecting analyzed information. Analysts' key ability is to update patterns linking facts from each other, leading to extensive concepts and to the use of procedures that facilitate analytical process. Knowledge and experience determines stock information and analytical scheme that evokes the analyst to generate and evaluate hypotheses. Key ability is the ability to update patterns linking facts from each other, leading to extensive concepts and the use of procedures that facilitate this process.

Memory processes tend to operate with generalized categories. When people do not have an appropriate category for something, they may not perceive "the thing" and store it. If these categories are incorrect, they will inaccurately perceive and remember things. When different types of information are stored in memory under a single category, errors may occur in the analysis. This is a common analytical bias counteracted by distinctions between categories and removing the ambiguity. In a benchmark article, *The Magic Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two*, George Miller (1956) underline the limitations of short-term

memory and draw the following conclusion: the number of things that people can remember at the same time is seven - plus or minus two. This limitation of active memory is a source of many errors. Speaking of thinking in terms of pros and cons, it means that only a few individuals can take into account more than three arguments in favor of an idea and three against the same idea at the same time. Memory depends on the quality of information stored on a specific theme, focused attention, the reliability of information and the importance attributed to information.

Analysts often receive new information which should logically lead them to reassess the credibility and significance of the foregoing. But memories are rarely reviewed retrospectively or reorganized in response to new information. For example, when an analyst considers a piece of information as important or irrelevant, that information is difficult to be stored and the analyst cannot remember it even if he changes his idea to the point where the same information, received today, could be recognized as very significant. Literature shows that individuals are characterized by dual rationality based on the idea that there are two different forms of cognitive processes: Type 1 (intuitive): fast, automatic, high capacity, this type of rationality is more vulnerable to errors, unconscious associations based on faith; Type 2 (reflexive): slow, controlled, low-capacity, rules-based, sequential, abstract and related to standards.

The two types of rationality are found in all analytical processes of everyday life: in learning, social cognition, reasoning, and decision making. Literature has shown that, despite the characteristics described before, errors cannot be associated with Type 1 nor performance with Type 2 (e.g. Evans, 2007, 2008). Studies show that both are strongly influenced by beliefs (Verschuere, Schaeken & Ydewalle, 2005). While Type 1 rationality is associated with the idea of ancestry, connecting with animal and its type of cognition, Type 2 rationality is recent in human evolutionary history (Evans, 2003, *apud* Evans 2013). Usually the two types of rationality cooperate, but there may be times when one of them takes over the other, such as the case of gambling. Ordinary situations make use of Type 1, and new extraordinary situations need Type 2 rationality (Evans, 2013).

Yet, there are tragic or heroic moments in history when fundamental decisions relied more on flair and intuition and made no use of any analysis. E.g. it is still present in the collective memory the

day of January 28, 1986, when rocket Challenger exploded into space in just 73 seconds after launch. The managers' decision to allow rocket launch under a temperature below 0°Celsius is such an example. Consensus group and the need to take a decision within a time limit can create a very dangerous illusion of invulnerability. Intelligence analysis is vulnerable to the occurrence of such situations when the right decision is sacrificed on the altar of individual subjectivity or beliefs of the group. Moreover, while structured analytical methods involve teamwork, J. Stoner (1961) found that the group is more likely to have risky decision, and the explanation is the diffusion of responsibility, because a group cannot be considered responsible for a potentially wrong decision. To be efficient in any working intelligence team analysts should value standards of independence and critical thinking.

6. CONCLUSIONS

We described a relatively small number of psychological processes that may occur during intelligence analysis, each representing a powerful con for rationality, but also a pro for internalizing the idea that analysts try hard to be objective, but they must understand that they may be deeply subjective in the process. Probably this is the only viable way to reduce the effects of subjectivity in intelligence analysis: by identifying and understanding how its effects affect logical argumentation.

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