

The Disclosure Dilemma: Intelligence and International Organizations

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November 14, 2015

How can IOs increase international cooperation?

- We highlight a common, over-looked problem of inefficient information-sharing: the disclosure dilemma
- Failure to share intelligence due to fears of compromising sources and methods leads to missed opportunities
- Argue that IOs can help to solve it
- Conventional approach to IOs focuses on other kinds of information

Sheds light on many IR questions such as how and when IOs are effective in enforcing international law

Mitigating the Disclosure Dilemma

A “disclosure dilemma”

- States making claims based on intelligence face a *credibility problem*
- Disclosing sources and methods required to make claims credible
- Potential damage to collection deters most intel sharing

An institutional solution

- Well designed IOs can receive, protect intel from one or more states
- IOs authenticate intelligence-based claims through three mechanisms
- Result = richer information sharing, better institutional performance

- Book-length project on intelligence and international organizations
- We formalize a disclosure dilemma and the role of IOs in mitigating it
- We analyze the role of intel in IOs in many empirical settings
- Find support for our theory's mechanisms
- Intelligence can play a critical role in IOs, but IOs must perform the mechanisms we identify in the conditions we specify.

Intelligence and International Public Goods

Intelligence defined as “explicitly concealed information gathered through clandestine means about another state’s behavior and intentions”

Intelligence can be kept private or shared with a range of audiences. Sharing can be complete or “scrubbed” of especially sensitive details

Intel about norm and treaty violations is often collected by powerful states. Could help in enforcing international laws

However, states often abstain from sharing intel about legal and normative violations—don’t want to compromise sources and methods

A Disclosure Dilemma

The importance of sources and methods for establishing credibility creates a trade-off between *political efficacy of intelligence claims* and the *effectiveness of later intelligence collection*

- Disclosing sources/methods establishes credibility but damages intelligence collection for current and other targets
- Withholding source/method protects collection but causes many observers to discount the intelligence claim

Result: Most intelligence that could improve global governance will not be shared

Mitigating the Dilemma

Analogy: journalists, anonymous sources, and the role of an editor

IOs can mitigate this disclosure dilemma by authenticating intelligence-based claims. Three mechanisms:

- Collect from multiple states (no sources/methods necessary)
- Collect from single state and investigate further (no sources/methods necessary)
- Collect from single state and vet the sources/methods

Conditions required: IO must protect sensitive information and possess a reputation for relatively unbiased judgments

Cheap Talk Model: Set-up and Utility

- Actors: two states, A and B , and observer O
- Prior to start of game, B has violated intl law with probability θ
- A can discern whether B violated but O cannot
- A can send a costless message to O , after which O must decide how severely to punish B (y)
- Alternatively, A can reveal sources and methods at cost c , which allows O to observe value of θ .
- O 's utility: seeks fair application of international law, $-(y - \theta)^2$
- A 's utility: fair application of the law plus bias b ,
 $-(y - (\theta + b))^2 - I(c)$

- A learns the value of θ
- A chooses whether to reveal its sources and methods
- A sends message m to O , leading O to form beliefs determined by the distribution function G
- O chooses whether to punish B

We solve the model in the absence of an IO and then consider the solution when states can delegate the punishment decision to the IO

No IO:

- If c is high so that sources and methods are not revealed, information is lost in every equilibria, and is decreasing in b
- A is more likely to reveal sources the lower c , and the further O 's punishment decision is from A 's preferred decision otherwise

IO:

- When IOs can collect intelligence conclusions from multiple informed states, states reveal their conclusions to the IO and all are better off, even if sources and methods are not disclosed.
- When the IO's bias is not too big and it can collect its own info, B is best off delegating to the IO, even if sources are not disclosed.
- The lower the chance of a leak, the more A reveals its info and its sources, and the IO authenticates and shares its conclusions with O .

Disclosure Dilemma in the Nuclear Realm

Model predicts: information lost without IO

- Nuclear activity often detected through sensitive sources and methods
- Disclosure could help (identifies non-compliance, builds political support for tougher verification and enforcement actions)
- States have a credibility problem: interest in non-proliferation but also political interests
- Iraq 2003: Bias/credibility problem and role of sources/methods.

Model predicts: When IOs can collect intelligence conclusions from multiple informed states, states reveal info and IO solves problem.

- IAEA refuses to base conclusions on single source: US offered to help with dismantling of South Africa's weapons but IAEA refused
- IAEA gathered intel from 10 countries regarding Iran's program—effective

When the IO's bias is not too big and it can collect its own info, states delegate to the IO and IO solves problem

- Iran 2003 Laptop episode: credibility problem because source unknown but IAEA investigates to corroborate
- Iraq 2003: IAEA fails to authenticate infamous Niger document which increases suspicion of U.S. bias—ineffective

When low chance of leak, states reveal sources and IO solves problem

- North Korea post 1992: US shares satellite imagery with IAEA secretariat re: suspicious site

Survey Experiment: Unilateral Claim:

We test whether the public believes IOs solve the dilemma. All read: The United States and Iran have recently completed a historical agreement in which Iran pledged not to develop its nuclear weapons for ten years.

- Suppose in the future that **Russia claims that it has evidence** that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement by developing nuclear weapons.
- However, Russia states that it **cannot provide evidence of this claim without revealing sensitive sources and methods** used for gathering intelligence, which could compromise its intelligence capabilities.

Unilateral Evidence

- Suppose in the future that Russia claims that it has evidence that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement by developing nuclear weapons.
- Further, Russia provides evidence of this claim even though doing so **reveals sensitive sources and methods** used for gathering intelligence, potentially compromising its intelligence capabilities.

Evidence Confirmed by UN

- Suppose in the future that Russia claims that it has evidence that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement by developing nuclear weapons.
- However, Russia states that it cannot provide evidence of this claim without revealing sensitive sources and methods used for gathering intelligence, which could compromise its intelligence capabilities.
- Instead, it **submits its evidence to a committee at the United Nations**, which confirms the validity of its claims about Iran's nuclear program.

Evidence Gathered by UN

- Suppose in the future that the United Nations gathers evidence that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement by developing nuclear weapons.
- Further, the **United Nations provides evidence of this claim.**

Evidence From Multiple States

- Suppose in the future that the United Nations **receives evidence from many countries** that Iran has violated the nuclear agreement by developing nuclear weapons.
- Although these countries do not reveal the sensitive sources and methods used for gathering intelligence, which can potentially compromise their intelligence capabilities, they all agree that nuclear weapons are being developed.

- Given the facts described in the scenario, how confident would you be that Iran developed nuclear weapons? [1=Not Confident; 7=Very Confident]
- Given the facts described in the scenario, would you support punishing Iran for developing nuclear weapons in violation of international law on the basis of the available evidence? [1=Definitely Not; 7=Yes, Absolutely]

Conclusion

- Theorize the role of intelligence in IOs
- Our theory offers a different role of IOs from the standard story: IOs solve inefficient info sharing through info protection
- Interesting normative tensions

The role of intelligence in IOs

Theorize and formally model disclosure dilemma, IOs' capacity to mitigate

Evaluate empirically in a variety of domains

- Nuclear Weapons
- Chemical Weapons
- Laws of War
- Cold War Rivalry
- Peacekeeping

Alternatives to IO

- Don't disclose and prevent/punish alone
- Ad hoc state-to-state intel sharing (can share sources/methods and may trust one another even without them): can work but small set of trustworthy states
- Hierarchy: states often do not agree to this