

Intelligence in Public Literature

The Rise and Fall of Intelligence: An International Security History

Michael Warner. (Georgetown University Press, 2014), 406 pp., end-of-chapter notes, bibliography, photos, index.

Reviewed by Hayden Peake

...all attempts to develop ambitious theories of intelligence have failed.

—Walter Laqueur

In a business as old as recorded history, one would expect to find a sophisticated understanding of just what that business is, what it does, and how it works. If the business is “intelligence,” however, we search in vain. As historian Walter Laqueur warned us, so far no one has succeeded in crafting a theory of intelligence.

—Michael Warner

In an apparent attempt to fill the void he described above in 2002, Michael Warner, a former CIA historian, adjunct professor of intelligence at American University, frequent contributor to and past Editorial Board member of *Studies in Intelligence*, and currently the historian of the US Cyber Command, has created in *The Rise and Fall of Intelligence* what may be his magnum opus.

Warner describes the rise of intelligence from pre-Sumerian times to its highpoint in the Cold War and then its “fall” with the onset of the digital age. His focus is not, however, on the details of espionage or covert action operations, though some are mentioned. Rather, he argues that, historically, utilization of “secret functions... appear to follow certain patterns. Knowledge of the factors behind these patterns gives us a basis for defining and comparing intelligence systems” as effected by “changes in technology and ideology [that] revolutionize espionage and ultimately transform it into intelligence.” (4-5) The organizations resulting from this transformation are a function of “three factors—strategy, technology, and regime type—that vary with each sovereign state.” He argues that the intelligence produced has “marginal but real effects” (6) that shape intelligence organizations, and inform policymakers and military planners.

Each of Warner’s eight chapters dwells on well-known events and the roles they played in the evolution of the business, with a common theme being the collection and processing of information for those in power. While his subjects are primarily the best-known East-West nations, with some attention to the Third World and China, the first chapter begins with a discussion of espionage in ancient times, beginning with Sun Tzu and Kautilya—the Indian author of the *Arthashastra*, a treatise on statecraft. After a summary of its evolution as influenced by the industrial revolution and military theorists like George Furse and Clausewitz, it ends in the turbulent world of 1914.

Along the way, Warner considers how intelligence as a process or system has been influenced by political turmoil; enlightenment thinkers John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and the revolutionary Vladimir Lenin. By the early 1900s, Warner writes, the seeds of an “international surveillance system had taken shape.” (29) This system was supported by new espionage agencies that arose as a result of increasing public awareness and the demands of revolutionary governments. “The needs of governments and militaries to gather and concentrate information by all available means were beginning to transform spycraft into intelligence.” (35)

Chapter 2 examines the dramatic expansion of intelligence services among the major participants during the First World War. It was a time, writes Warner, when “espionage morphed into intelligence” (62)—a phrase he uses to indicate that “the days when national leaders like Napoleon and Washington “ran [their] own networks” were over. (39) New agencies and techniques were created to meet the demands of new organizations, civilian and military.

As Warner does throughout the book, he describes the functions the new organizations performed—airial reconnaissance, cryptologic, military, internal security, communications—and their impact on international relations. He

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spends little time on specific intelligence operations. He mentions a number of espionage and covert action cases, but he does not elaborate, leaving the details for readers to seek out. In short, his is a top-down view of how intelligence influences geopolitical and economic maneuvering among the major powers.

The interwar period and WW II itself are treated in the next chapter. Here Warner tells how, after enduring cutbacks that followed the peace, the nation states gradually built up their intelligence capabilities to meet the ideological threats of communism and national socialism. He stresses that during the war, intelligence—in particular ULTRA and MAGIC—“allowed the Western allies to pick their battles.” (122) This flexibility, coupled with nuclear weapons, he argues, prevented protracted land engagements. The legacy of WW II intelligence in the postwar era, Warner concludes, was both the perpetuation of national intelligence organizations and multinational alliances created on both sides of the Iran Curtain “capable of functioning on a global basis.” (131)

The next three chapters cover the Cold War and depict intelligence at its apex, notwithstanding occasional blunders and the congressional investigations they provoked. Here Warner describes the formation of the CIA and efforts to integrate intelligence operations with policymaking to address strategic issues in cooperation with our allies. At the same time, operations were undertaken to counter Soviet espionage during the war that were only recognized and dealt with afterward, thanks mainly to the Venona Program and some Soviet key defectors. Brief examples include the Fuchs atomic espionage case, the Hiss case, and the Rosenberg network. (157)

Turning to foreign intelligence capabilities, Warner discusses the impact of the Korean War, the arms race, various other international crises, and the rapport with policymakers. On the counterintelligence front, there is a reference to several important Soviet agents—Nosenko, Penkovsky, Popov, and Polyakov—and some important defectors. Likewise, Warner mentions the ubiquitous KGB and “highly proficient Stasi and HVA,” (251) that dominated Cold War relations with the West and justified expensive—though successful—technological programs such as the U-2 and satellite systems. Overall, he concludes, “intelligence helped to stabilize” the Cold War (164) and “by the early 1970s the United States had become the undisputed world intelligence leader.” (165)

Despite the impressive US technological achievements, the ever-present Soviet (and to some extent Chinese) ideological threat caused persistent problems for Western intelligence that came to a head in congressional hearings in the 1970s. Warner views this situation as a consequence of White House-approved CIA covert action programs of mixed quality in Cuba, Iran, Africa, South America, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. An added complication was the 1971 burglary of an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania, that confirmed that the Bureau had been keeping files on anti-war dissidents. In addition, there began a seemingly endless series of exposés in books and articles by former CIA employees following the “prototype established by Kim Philby’s *My Silent War*.” (210)

All of the above climaxed in the Church Senate Committee and Pike House Committee hearings on intelligence that Warner identifies as a pivotal point in the way Western intelligence would function thereafter. The investigative process and resulting precedents were “watched with fascination and horror by other intelligence services around the world.” (216) As an aside, Warner notes, the investigations increased “openness” and stimulated the academic interest in intelligence that has continued to grow to the present. (213) A crucial point Warner emphasizes is that despite the multi-year investigations, the “changes in American intelligence in the 1970s did not improve it.” (215) Failures persisted as the Soviet Union expanded its attempts to influence Third World nations and the Iranian hostage-taking caught the West by surprise.

For much of the 1980s, US covert actions in Latin America, counterintelligence problems in the CIA, and the Iran-Contra affair would dominate the headlines. But the Soviet Union was having problems, too, with rapid changes in leadership, the end of the war in Afghanistan, and the instability brought on by Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika. Warner analyzes these issues under the heading of “The End of History.” (248) He never explains precisely what that term means, but his discussion covers the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War, “The Liberal Triumph,” and its effect on the Western and Russian intelligence services as a transition to “The World Online” began. (265)

The Rise and Fall of Intelligence concludes with discussion of the digital revolution and an analysis of post-9/11 and cyber-related events as they influenced and were

influenced by intelligence. “The exposure of Stuxnet, Flame, and GhostNet by German, Russian and Canadian researchers spoke volumes about the state of intelligence in the twenty-first century.” (309) Regrettably, Warner does not elaborate, but he does discuss some problems resulting from “big-data” collection, excessive government surveillance and the risks to privacy, non-state actors—corporate and terrorist—developing their own capable intelligence systems. While he never says so directly, Warner implies that the confluence of these factors has led to the fall of intelligence, though from his perspective that

does not mean the collapse of the profession, but rather its dispersion among many players, state and non-state, thus multiplying the number of creators of “intelligence” and the number of counterintelligence targets government intelligence services will have to cover. Warner ends by speculating on the future of intelligence and whether it will “be a force for good as well as ill?” (338)

Extensively documented, *The Rise and Fall of Intelligence* will challenge students while giving the interested reader important context about the role of intelligence in international relations.



