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**Strategic Warning Intelligence: History, Challenges, and Prospects**

John A. Gentry and Joseph S. Gordon (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 274 pp., bibliography, index

**Reviewed by Ryan Shaffer**

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In *Strategic Warning Intelligence*, the authors seek to fill a gap in the literature of intelligence by offering a contemporary study of the evolution of strategic warning, providing warning methodologies and techniques, and suggesting ways to overcome dysfunctions they perceive. Drawing partly from their respective careers at the Central Intelligence Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency, John A. Gentry and Joseph S. Gordon surveyed academic literature on warning, including in related fields like deception and denial. They also reviewed declassified intelligence records and conducted interviews with intelligence officers. The authors note that Cynthia M. Grabo's landmark work *Anticipating Surprise: Analysis for Strategic Warning* was completely declassified 44 years after it was written and one year after she died. That book drew on Grabo's expertise in possible scenarios for a Warsaw Pact invasion in Europe, a perspective now dated, given geopolitical developments and the emergence of multiple transnational, non-state threats. Gentry and Gordon's work offers a more academic approach, employing fields like psychology, while seeking to help analysts warn their customers about 21st century threats.

The book consists of a preface, an introduction—which includes a useful review of the “expanding” literature on intelligence warning, much of it on display in a 20-page bibliography—and 12 chapters. These, the authors point out in the introduction, are organized in four sections; the first chapter defines warning and its concepts; chapters two through four provide history—including notable failures—lessons from that history, a taxonomy of warning institutions and an overview of the evolution of US, British, Dutch, and NATO warning institutions; chapters five through 11 address challenges, methods and bureaucratic issues; and chapter 12 delves into prospects.

Gentry and Gordon define strategic warning intelligence as the “communication to senior national decision-makers of the potential for, or actually impending, events of major significance to national interests and recommendations that leaders consider making policy

decisions and/or taking actions to address the situations.” (12) Noting that warning is “underappreciated,” they explain the key to identifying trends involves intelligence collection, accurate assessment and persuasively conveying that analysis to decisionmakers.

The authors' historical review addresses four warning cases: the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944, the Yom Kippur War in 1973, and the US Intelligence Community's (IC's) warning of the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1990. From these case studies, they draw seven lessons, which, interestingly, focus on the human dimensions of strategic warning. These include psychological factors of individual analysts, the perspectives of leaders and the impact of their environments on their thinking, the expertise of analysts, and the quality of intelligence personnel, among others. (49) They return to these themes throughout the book.

As for historical government warning systems, the subject of the third chapter, Gentry and Gordon categorize five types. These include national leaders who serve as their own warning analysts and a system of analysts who are all responsible for warning, through their command chains, about issues in their areas of expertise. They also discuss the widened view of strategic intelligence that encompasses elements of what was previously tactical warning. In addressing the development of warning institutions, Gentry and Gordon explain that the US warning system is currently the only example with a “strong version” of the “every-analyst-a-warning-analyst” model. (102)

In the next section, the authors examine operational challenges to strategic warning and responses. Gentry and Gordon explore methodological issues of warning, explaining analysts must know their customers' wants and needs, and high-ranking national security officials are focused on “short time horizons” for the crises that they have to address. Turning to the indicators and warning method as well as its variants, they argue it is “useful to

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both warning specialists and intelligence analysts generally” and it “is relatively easy to use in monitoring operations and to explain to intelligence consumers.” (138) Gentry and Gordon also describe other analytic warning techniques, such as horizon scanning and the roles of individual analysts’ psychology and political leaders’ personal experiences in shaping warning analysis and reception.

Focusing on specific character traits for good warning analysts, they cite authors like Grabo and Barton Whaley, who argue that certain personality types are best suited for warning; they are “unusually bright, creative people”; “moderately unorthodox in intellectual outlook”; can “get along with most people” as they question their views; and have “modest” career goals and desire for praise. (182) Broadening the scope to warning outside of formal IC channels, Gentry and Gordon examine economic, natural disaster, and health warnings from businesses, non-government organizations, and international organizations that produce valuable warning. They then explore the cultural differences between politicians and analysts as well as briefly describe approaches to intelligence of each US president since Franklin D. Roosevelt, arguing that warning officers can teach their customers about aspects of warning to help them avoid warning mistakes.

In the last chapter of the challenges section, Gentry and Gordon examine institutional problems affecting strategic warning in the IC. Issues they see, for example, are the focus on current intelligence, with a short-term outlook that “precludes” warning; “weak” warning training at the major intelligence agencies; the denigration of expertise caused by emphasis on current intelligence; a lack of long-term research; and the expansive scope of warning issues beyond non-military threats.

Looking forward, Gentry and Gordon conclude that the “emphasis on strategic warning intelligence in the United States” is “now deep in one of its periodic troughs,” and they recommend significant structural changes to reconstitute strategic warning. (235) Citing others’ recommendations as well as their own, the authors call for reforms ranging from more emphasis on warning in basic training courses to “a small number of elite, senior intelligence officers within line analytic units of IC agencies who have warning responsibilities and are given unfettered access to senior decision-makers.” (239)

*Strategic Warning Intelligence* is probably most suited for junior analysts, students of intelligence, and others looking for a basic treatment of strategic warning issues. It provides a solid synthesis of earlier works, bringing together aspects of the history of strategic warning—including the personalities who have played roles in its development since WWII—and the methodologies used for warning. It also does a good job of analyzing current problems and challenges.

More experienced intelligence professionals and scholars will be familiar with much of the material, especially the case studies, which seem to this reviewer to be relatively superficial summaries drawn from secondary literature. In addition, it is not clear how some of the cases or discussion of warning in countries with different military and political cultures over differing time periods contribute materially to the authors’ closing discussion of problems, methods, institutions and reforms unique to the United States.

Still, this is a useful textbook for introductory intelligence courses and a good reference for interested analysts, scholars, and policymakers.



The reviewer: Ryan Shaffer is a writer and historian. His academic work explores Asian, African and European history.