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**Challenges in Intelligence Analysis: Lessons from 1300 BC to the Present**

**by Timothy Walton**

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**Reviewed by Ross Gouseinov**

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**E**vents such as 9/11 and the Iraq War have once again pushed the notion of ‘Intelligence failure’ to the forefront of security discussions. Similar to what occurred in the past, these events introduced proposals geared towards reforming the Intelligence Community. Much of the focus of these proposals,

however, lay in reorganizations, creation of new departments and agencies, and an increased reliance upon advanced technologies. In terms of the Intelligence Cycle, most of the efforts have focused upon restructuring and updating the Direction and Collection steps, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Little, if any, attention has been given to arguably the most important step of the Cycle: improving analytical thinking. Timothy Walton, adjunct professor of Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst College, and a former analyst for the CIA, addresses this gap for the benefit of both the members of the profession of arms and the Intelligence Community.

As the title of his book suggests, Walton attempts to outline the difficulties and pitfalls in providing accurate analysis and interpretation to decision makers. His is a compelling study of the history of intelligence analysis, from Biblical times to the present. Although each historical situation is unique, Walton provides

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common principles which are helpful in identifying the main issues, evaluating the evidence, and laying out the options and risks. Even though the scope of the book focuses primarily upon security-related issues, it does not limit itself to this realm. It also discusses the applications of analysis in business and marketing-related intelligence events.

Walton begins with a definition of analysis, and a discussion of the main challenges faced by an intelligence analyst: uncertainty, surprise, deception, and the future. He then describes some of the techniques that can deal with these challenges, such as chronology and timeline, link analysis, competitive hypotheses, and various matrix models. Finally, he stresses the importance of presenting the decision maker with, not only the *problems*, but also the *options* and the *opportunities* that are available to him. Following the initial chapters dealing with analysis challenges and solutions, Walton proceeds to cover 39 historical events, ranging from Hebrew spies in Canaan, to Caesar's campaigns in Gaul, to 9/11 and Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. A particular emphasis is placed upon Intelligence analysis in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The cases are historical summaries that follow Walton's own analysis of a given event. The author notes that cognitive biases play a significant role throughout the book, especially confirmation bias, 'groupthink,' and anchoring bias. If the reader is interested in a more in-depth study of a particular event, a recommended reading list is included at the end of each study.

The author successfully outlines the main facts related to each historical event, and then demonstrates how Intelligence played a critical role in almost every major conflict, or campaign, in history. Many of the events and analysis described by Walton are relevant to the modern geopolitical context. For example, the lessons he outlined in his chapter dealing with the British counterinsurgency operation in Malaya was not lost upon General David Petraeus and Lieutenant General James Amos, when they wrote the US Counterinsurgency Field Manual. Furthermore, the indicators outlined in "the fall of the Shah" chapter and how analysts failed to capitalize upon them closely resemble the situation in the Muslim world prior to the Arab Spring. Walton also provides interesting anecdotes, such as the fact that link analysis, now a standard component of any intelligence analyst's tool kit, was first created by FBI Counter-Intelligence during their hunt for atomic spies during the Cold War, and that the phrase, "winning the hearts and minds" of a populace first originated with the British during

the Malaysian counterinsurgency. Furthermore, events are not described in a vacuum, as Walton refers to previously discussed events and then compares them to one another.

The book does have its weaknesses. In certain chapters, it fails to draw the link between the analysis techniques presented in the introductory chapters and the historical cases. For example, his account of Moses sending spies into Canaan only summarizes what took place, with no mention of what analysis technique was or was not used. In discussing Stalin's assessment of a German attack, the book does not analyze why Stalin refused to believe the indicators

presented to him by his intelligence staff that pointed to an imminent attack. Walton simply states that "Stalin's failure to assess Hitler in 1941 was not due to a lack of information" (p.86). Moreover, Walton does not clearly indicate why he specifically chose those 39 events for discussion, other than by saying that they were "of interest for an intelligence analyst." In that case, why was there no mention of the Battle of Midway, D-Day, or the Battle of the Bulge, as they were all significant 20<sup>th</sup> Century events in which Intelligence played a key role. Moreover, the major weakness of the book is the lack of sources in any of the author's claims, which leads to confusing statements. For example, Walton writes that shortly before Igor Gouzenko's defection (5 September 1945), Soviet Spy Elizabeth Bentley had provided information to the FBI field office in New Haven (p.116). In fact, Bentley went to the Bureau office in New York on 7 November 1945. Furthermore, the

author claims that it was Harry Gold, a courier for a number of Soviet spy rings, that identified Klaus Fuchs, a Soviet Atomic spy, to the authorities, whereas in reality, it was Fuchs who identified Gold (p.117).<sup>2</sup>

In essence, *Challenges in Intelligence Analysis* is an excellent introduction for anyone interested in intelligence analysis and its shortcomings. The book does a good job with respect to describing historical cases in which analysis was undertaken. However, it lacks depth in providing the details of that analysis. Nonetheless, this book is highly recommended overall, and it will doubtless spark further academic research into analysis, how it is conducted, and its impact upon the outcomes of operations.

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## NOTES

1 The intelligence cycle is the process of developing unrefined data into polished intelligence for the use of commanders and policymakers. It consists of five steps: Direction, Collection, Processing, Analysis, and Dissemination.

2 Amy Knight, *How The Cold War Began: The Igor Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt For Soviet Spies*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2005); Allen Hornblum, *The Invisible Harry Gold: The Man Who Gave the Soviets the Atom Bomb*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Hayden

Peake, "Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf," at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol.-55-no.-2/intelligence-officer2019s-bookshelf.html>, July 06 2011. Accessed 10 December 2012.