

Chapter 1

The Plan of the Book

National security intelligence must function in a complex and uncertain international environment. Under such circumstances, trying to anticipate and prepare for the future is the most difficult task that governments face. How can any government, especially those of small to medium sized developed states, be expected to anticipate contingencies when there are no maps to the future?

Fundamental strategic surprise — that which achieves an advantage over an unprepared enemy — is a fact of history. It has been with us for as long as there have been recorded histories of conflict — and that is more than 2,500 years. The past record is not encouraging. Despite warnings about how to prepare for the future (Sun Tzu — circa 500 B.C. — and Thucydides — 400 B.C.), strategic surprise has been a fact of life from the days of the ancients to the present.

1.1 Introduction

I am not an academic, but rather a practitioner of intelligence. At some point in the future, academics must return to play a larger role. But their insistence on building boundaries for knowledge instead of breaking them down causes them to disappear down their own silos, a practice that is well known in the intelligence community.



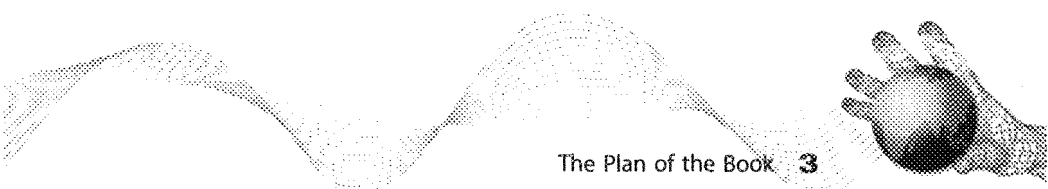
An over fascination with “definitions” and the need to be labeled as a “neo realist,” a “critical theorist” or even a “critical theorist from the Frankfurt school of thought” renders them inaccessible to mainstream intelligence analysts, policy makers, and decision makers. This is a pity, as academia has produced valuable schools of thought and tools of analysis that could further help to inform us about our world.

I am a generalist. Many people believe that a room full of specialists from differing backgrounds equals general knowledge. This is simply not true. Specialists articulate arguments from within their own area of expertise and they have difficulties integrating knowledge across the boundaries that define specialization. However, being a generalist is currently out of fashion and our various developed societies have placed a premium on specialization. This is occurring at a time when we need more people who can see the big picture. Our education systems and many of our leaders are failing us badly in this area.

This book may have some weaknesses that are unavoidable as a result of the previous two points. First, no academic agreement exists on many of the key issues. For instance, what is the role of the state now? Is the state becoming more powerful as we move to increase the roles of securitization and surveillance? Or, as others argue, are the institutions of the state under attack and facing collapse under the pressures of globalization? Or maybe both are true depending on the location and condition of the individual state. As such, generalizations have to be made because policy makers and decision makers have to work from a framework of understanding, even if it is sometimes inexact.

Second, this book is intended primarily to be read by leaders, decision makers and the “worker bees” who occupy the worlds of security, intelligence, economics, and policy. For them, an endless mound of detail is not the requirement. They need finite analysis and, within this context, clarity and brevity are the essence of communication. I accept the fact that counter arguments exist, but in the world of operations and policy, the practical imperatives outweigh the theoretical.

I have seen the consequences of state failure. The potential brutality of our fellow human beings under these circumstances is astounding. One look into the eyes of a refugee or a walk through a bombed out village in Yugoslavia serves as a warning lesson as to the consequences of failure.



As such, I make the decision to generalize for the purpose of functionality with a clear conscience in the hope that we can partially avoid further catastrophic failures.

The genesis for this book comes from many areas. Not least is my twenty years in a variety of intelligence positions in a number of countries. Some of the experiences were positive and exciting, such as being declared a court expert on jihadism in support of a criminal investigation. Other experiences were less positive, especially when dealing with those persons who favoured centralization and bureaucratic processes over any actual intelligence analysis. However, all of the experiences have been educational.

1.2 The Outline of the Book

This book presents a framework for thinking about national security, the international environment, and the intelligence requirements needed to support leaders and decision makers.

This may come as a shock to many, but all too often individuals are thrust into an intelligence or enforcement role with little or no training. The individual may have some relevant background experience, or they may not. This has been my situation on a number of occasions.

This is a common problem in many countries and even the so-called “developed” countries are every bit as guilty. This book hopes to provide at least a partial solution to the problem by providing a framework of analysis for thinking about national security intelligence problems.

The book is structured into six main sections as follows:

National Security and its Environment. In Chapters 2 and 3, the changing role of the state will be examined. Without understanding what the role of the state requires, it is difficult to understand how to provide security for that state. Following that, the international environment will be examined with respect to the intelligence requirements that are needed to support national security in a complex and sometimes hostile environment.

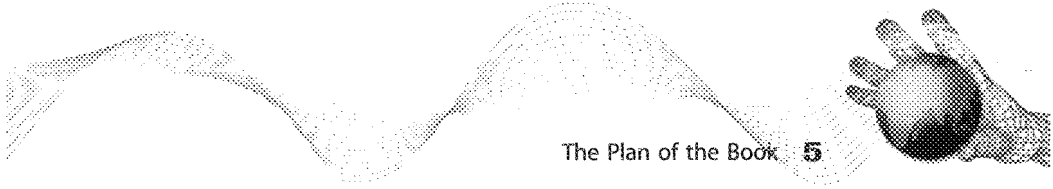
Strategic Warning and Strategic Surprise. Five chapters of varying length will examine the issues of strategic surprise, strategic warning and the failures that have occurred. Chapter 4 provides background information on strategic



warning and strategic surprise as well as definitions of the key terms used. It also examines key reasons for intelligence failures. Chapter 5 provides a historical overview of strategic surprise from the time of the ancients to the present. Chapter 6 explains why we tend to reinforce failures in the intelligence world and how this has been done again after 9/11. Chapter 7 looks at the pervasive and frequently corrosive role that technology has played in intelligence and how this has negatively impacted intelligence assessment capabilities. It also examines a related phenomena of the dangerous trend in some states towards the increasing militarization of the whole intelligence process. Finally, Chapter 8 takes a short look at one of the great contradictions of the intelligence world — the belief in a centralized intelligence capability. “Central intelligence” can be a contradiction in terms under some circumstances.

Faint Signals and Horizon Scanning. After every major intelligence failure, an exercise occurs whereby it is established that “faint signals” that should have been seen or heard were missed. The dots, as they say, were not connected. This kind of retrospective coherence is common not just in the intelligence world, but right across most forms of human behavior. Chapter 9 will examine the issues of faint signals, trend monitoring and “horizon scanning” as well as five cases of missed faint signals that were detrimental. Chapter 10 will contrast this with an examination of several current examples where faint signals are being missed now that may cause upset later.

Successes and Opportunities. It is common, and perhaps even fashionable to attack the intelligence community for its “failures,” even when it is often clear that the event failures were more directly related to policy shortcomings. To contrast this, Chapter 11 will use examples of successes that have occurred in counter terrorism operations as a means to demonstrate how intelligence has worked. More importantly, it will examine where it has worked. Almost all the successes have been close to the front lines and initiated by human judgment, or they were cases of the front line analysis of technical clues provided by computers. Another poorly understood function of national security is that of the role of the citizen. Great successes have occurred when “average citizens” have taken a role in a crisis situation. Further to that, the ultimate outcome of any event depends more on the response to the event rather than the actual event itself. In national security terms, some of the most critical first responders may be citizens. Their actions may shape the outcome of the event. Chapter 12 will examine one of the most underused opportunities that exists for national security operations — that of open



source intelligence. Secrecy is the ally of the weaker party in an asymmetric conflict while knowledge is the friend of the stronger party. Knowledge (and the sharing of knowledge) is the critical component in defeating an asymmetric threat situation. A good defence in an asymmetric struggle can only come from an understanding of the threat (knowledge) and therefore an ability to combat it or stop the threat before it materializes. As such, open source intelligence may be the most underused tool in the national security toolbox.

Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning. Given the uncertain and complex environment, is there anything that can be done to prepare for the future, or must we simply wait for disasters to occur? Options do exist to enhance the odds for success or survival. Technology by itself is not the answer, although a combination of cognitive skills and technological support are emerging to allow for the detection of faint signals and the ability to put them into a warning context. Chapter 13 will extend this discussion on some of the current problem areas and how they needed to be avoided. Chapter 14 will examine the areas of naturally occurring strengths that exist and how these can be adapted for service in the future. Chapter 15 will examine the Risk Assessment and Horizon Scanning Program in Singapore which is attempting to break the “stove-pipes” and mindset failures that have plagued the world of institutionalized intelligence. This chapter will also examine how a globalized network of “horizon scanning” programs needs to be integrated among like-minded developed nations in order to provide the best warning and protection to all concerned.

Rethinking National Security. The entire concept of national security in a complex and uncertain world needs to be addressed. First and foremost, national security discussions have to be dragged out of the closet and into the public arena. They should not be kept hidden away from public view. Issues such as sovereignty and the strength of the national social fabric are at stake and secrecy undermines the entire process. As a conclusion to the book, Chapter 16 will examine the complex issues at stake and make specific policy recommendations to face future threats. Often overlooked are the education and experience requirements for personnel recruiting. While not a direct part of the national security process, education is a critical issue. It is a dangerous fallacy to assume that an intelligence “process” can somehow improve the quality of intelligence above the level of the quality of its producers. Appendix A, therefore, takes a look at the educational requirements for the future.