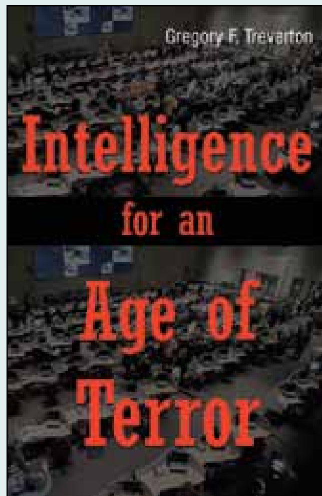

Intelligence for an Age of Terror
By Gregory F. Treverton
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Reviewed by
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Gregory Treverton first went to work in the intelligence area in the mid-1970s as a staffer for the Senate committee led by Idaho Senator Frank Church, investigating intelligence blunders that surfaced in the wake of the Watergate investigation. Now a RAND researcher with many publications in the intelligence field to his credit, Dr. Treverton offers this book as a prescription for intelligence work in the 21st century—focused on, but not exclusive to, the counterterrorism battle. With it, he makes an invaluable contribution to the discussion of the role of intelligence in the age of terror, and he asks urgent questions about what needs to be changed to respond to a fundamentally different threat from that of the Cold War—the conflict for which most U.S. intelligence organs were designed.

Treverton argues that the key to making the transition to 21st-century intelligence is in understanding the distinction between intelligence "puzzles" and "mysteries." A "puzzle" is what U.S. intelligence agencies were accustomed to facing during the Cold War—"How many warheads does a Soviet missile carry?" This is a question that has a definitive answer that is known by relatively few people; hence, finding the answer becomes the focus of human and technological intelligence collection efforts. A "mystery," by contrast, is about people and their intentions. Understanding possible terrorist intentions and targets is a much harder problem, and, as Treverton points out, "Cold War espionage practices will not work against terrorist targets because… Al Qaeda operatives do not go to embassy cocktail parties" (p. 9).

Another consequence of focusing on "mysteries" is the increased potential for "information overload." The inability of the United States to foil the September 11 attacks was due not to too little information about the terrorists, but rather too much information compartmented in such a way as to frustrate attempts to connect the dots. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and Federal Aviation Administration all had clues to parts of the 9/11 mystery but were unable to put the pieces together largely because of institutional restraints. And although the 2004 Terrorism Prevention and Intelligence Reform Act has made strides in breaking free from these institutional restraints, some still remain.

More problematic is the difficulty of separating the wheat from the chaff of intelligence data, which increasingly relies upon information in the public domain: "During the Cold War, the problem was too little (good) information; now, it is too much (unreliable) information. Then, intelligence's secrets were deemed reliable; now, the plethora on the Web is a stew of fact, fancy, and disinformation" (p. 31).

Chapter 6, "The Special Challenge of Analysis," and chapter 7, "Many Customers, Too Many Secrets," and the tables therein, are especially incisive and useful. Analysis, the author argues, will become increasingly important as intelligence agencies attempt to wrestle with the wealth of good and bad information available. One table traces the transition of analysis from past and present to a possible future. A focus box proposes alternative future analysis techniques: Contrarian Analysis (consisting of *Devil's Advocacy, A Team/B Team Analysis,* and *Red Team Analysis*) and Contingent Analysis (consisting of *What-If Analysis, Low Probability/High Impact Analysis,* and *Alternative Scenarios*).

Treverton also addresses the issue of politicization of intelligence in a balanced and judicious way. His conclusion, however, is somewhat pessimistic: "The temptations of leaders to either try to turn policy issues into intelligence questions or use intelligence to make the case for their preferred policies seem likely to grow" (p. 183).

Chapter 8, "Covert Action," is the book's most engaging chapter. Perhaps this is because Treverton had previously penned a book specifically on the subject (*Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* [Basic Books, 1987]). Whenever covert action is suggested, the author proposes first answering three "what if" tests. The first is the *New York Times* test. As the name implies, it forces covert action planners to confront what the consequences might be of a front-page article in the *New York Times* revealing U.S. complicity in a covert action. The second "what if" test is answering the question, "What if the first intervention does not succeed? What then?" The third test relates to the larger consequences of attempted covert action: "What signal will be received, by whom, and with what result?"

In the final chapter, "Rebuilding the Social Contract," the author returns to lessons he learned in the Church Committee and argues for an ethical intelligence collection and covert action policy for the Nation—"The United States must not adapt [*sic*] the tactics of its enemies. Means are as important as ends. Crisis makes it tempting to ignore the wise restraints that make men free. But each time we do so, each time the means we use are wrong, our inner strength, the strength which makes us free, is lessened" (p. 235). These words, taken from one of the Church Committee's reports, ring just as true for the author today as they did when written in 1976.

And with these words, Treverton has shown himself to be a master of not only the content of the field of intelligence, but also its ultimately noble intent—to help us to remain both safe and free. **JFQ**

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