Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda, and: Uncovering Ways of War: U.S. Intelligence and Foreign Military Innovation, 1918-1941 (review)

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Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda.

By John Keegan. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003. Pp. xx+387. $30.

Uncovering Ways of War: U.S. Intelligence and Foreign Military Innovation, 1918–1941.

By Thomas G. Mahnken. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002. Pp. x+190. $35.

The importance of military intelligence has long been a matter of debate. More than two millenia ago, the Chinese general and military theorist Sun Tzu asserted that secret operations are essential in war, yet the term "military intelligence" is still often only half-jokingly described as an oxymoron. In these volumes, both John Keegan and Thomas Mahnken attempt to assess the value of intelligence to military organizations by examining historical case studies.

Despite the similarities in their general subject matter and methodology, the two authors reach strikingly different conclusions regarding the value of military intelligence. Keegan expresses a decidedly skeptical view of intelligence. After examining its role in Admiral Horatio Nelson's Nile campaign in 1798, General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley campaign in 1862, cruiser warfare in World War I, the Allied defense of Crete in 1941, the Battle of Midway in 1942, the Battle of the Atlantic from 1939 to 1945, and the Allied attempts to counter the German V-weapons from 1942 to 1945, he concludes that intelligence, though perhaps necessary, is not sufficient for military victory.

Mahnken's judgment is more favorable. Based on his study of the ability of U.S. military intelligence organizations during the interwar period to recognize innovation in nine areas—Japanese carrier aviation, surface warfare, and amphibious warfare; German armored warfare, tactical aviation, and rocketry; and British tank experiments, armored warfare, and integrated air defense—he argues that intelligence agencies are able to detect foreign attempts to develop new ways of warfare and that intelligence can influence military technology and doctrine. Mahnken also suggests three factors that influence the capability of intelligence organizations to detect innovation. First, they are more likely to monitor the development of established weaponry than to search for new military systems. Second, they tend to pay more attention to technology and doctrine successfully demonstrated in combat than to those not proven in this way. Third, they find it easier to identify innovation in areas that their own services are exploring than in those the services have not examined or have rejected.

One explanation for the difference of opinion regarding the value of intelligence lies in the way the two authors define their subject. Keegan

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intends the title of his book literally; he is interested only in wartime intelligence—the short-term, usually clandestine effort to collect information that contributes to success in battle. (He refers to peacetime intelligence as "espionage" and suggests that it is unseemly, untrustworthy, inscrutable, and worst of all, indecisive.) Keegan identifies two types of wartime intelligence, strategic intelligence and real-time intelligence. Strategic intelligence comprises general information on enemy strengths, weaknesses, intentions, and dispositions, while real-time intelligence is information on enemy location, composition, and objective acquired in time to make operational or tactical use of it.

Historically, the relative value of each type has been determined by the level of technological development, especially speed of communications. As long as this did not exceed the speed of enemy movement, strategic intelligence was most important, although it rarely conveyed an advantage in actual time and space. The introduction of more rapid means of communication beginning in the nineteenth century, however, made real-time intelligence possible. Keegan therefore sees the history of modern military intelligence as largely the history of signals intelligence. Yet he is careful to point out that even successful signals intelligence does not ensure military victory. The British ability to decrypt enciphered messages sent by the German Enigma machine provided foreknowledge of the timing, objectives, and composition of the airborne invasion of Crete in 1941, but could not prevent its loss.

Mahnken, in contrast to Keegan, focuses exclusively on peacetime intelligence, the long-term effort to collect information, usually openly, in order to identify new ways of war and avert strategic surprise. The chief sources of such intelligence were military and naval attachés assigned to the capitals of major overseas powers. The attachés visited military facilities, toured factories, observed field maneuvers, monitored the press, and exchanged information with their foreign counterparts.

Given their divergent definitions of intelligence, it is not surprising that the two authors differ in their opinion of its worth. Yet both definitions are too narrow. Intelligence includes both wartime and peacetime activities, clandestine and overt collection methods. Privileging one type of intelligence provides a distorted picture of its overall value. Keegan's disdain for peacetime intelligence causes him to ignore the contributions of the interwar U.S. military intelligence agencies described by Mahnken. Similarly, Mahnken's focus on open-source intelligence obscures the relative inability of those intelligence agencies to use clandestine methods to ferret out potential adversaries' most closely held secrets.

The two authors differ not only in how they define intelligence, but also in how effectively they make their arguments. Both claim to counter prevailing interpretations regarding the value of intelligence, but only Mahnken provides any evidence that the interpretation he is rebutting actually

exists. He demonstrates that orthodox historiography has portrayed U.S. military intelligence in the interwar period as ineffective and he successfully employs archival materials and clear, logical arguments to refute that view. Keegan, on the other hand, asserts that conventional wisdom holds intelligence to be the key to success in military operations but provides no evidence to support this claim. To demolish the straw man he has created, he cites secondary sources to make arguments that are occasionally confusing and repetitious.

Readers seeking a wide-ranging discussion of wartime intelligence and its interaction with technological development may enjoy Keegan's book, while those desiring a well-documented and convincingly argued examination of peacetime military intelligence and its ability to identify new technologies and doctrines will appreciate Mahnken's. Readers looking for a comprehensive assessment of the value of military intelligence in both war and peace, however, will have to keep searching.

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The Precision Revolution: GPS and the Future of Aerial Warfare.

By Michael Russell Rip and James M. Hasik. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2002. Pp. xvi+552. $48.95.

The Precision Revolution examines the development of the global positioning system and its integration into the latest generation of precise weapons systems. The authors, Michael Rip and James Hasik, see GPS as being central to the current revolution in military affairs. They begin with a brief history of military air and space navigation, followed by an examination of the development in the 1970s and 1980s of the Navstar Global Positioning System and its Russian Glonass equivalent. They then describe the use of GPS-guided weapons in the Persian Gulf War, and follow with a detailed technical history of the development of GPS-guided weapons and accounts of their use in smaller military actions throughout the next decade, from Libya to Serbia. They conclude with a postscript relating the terrorist attack on New York and Washington in September 2001.

This book contains a wealth of information on the latest developments in precision-guided military ordnance and related technologies. It is profusely illustrated with photographs, tables, maps, and diagrams to assist the reader in understanding these extremely complex weapon systems. Rip and Hasik have struck a nice balance, providing detailed technical descriptions of these systems while making them understandable to readers who do not have advanced degrees in electrical engineering and computer technology.

The Precision Revolution also provides a valuable history of the evolu-