

Shulsky, Abram N., and Gary J. Schmitt. *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence*, 3rd ed. Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002.

With the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the war in Afghanistan and then the invasion of Iraq, the word intelligence has become a household term and a catch-all expression used on a daily basis by many people within government, the media and the general public alike. Unfortunately, many people seem to misunderstand or misinterpret the concept of intelligence. For them, and for anyone else with any degree of interest in the world of intelligence, *Silent Warfare* is undeniably the best starting point, although it was written before the terrorist attacks.

Abram Shulsky, who wrote the original 1991 edition, and Gary Schmitt, who took part in the 1993 re-edition, present a dense and comprehensive treatise aimed at helping us understand the intricate world of intelligence – hence the judiciously-chosen title. Now in its third edition, this book has incontestably become the best primer on intelligence available. *Silent Warfare* provides us with a guide – virtually a textbook – covering all areas from intelligence-gathering to covert action, from intelligence analysis to counterintelligence, from the management of intelligence to definitions of that elusive term. The reader will greatly enjoy the clear and logical structure of the book and the fact that the authors go straight to the point. All chapters are kept relatively short (either ten- or thirty-page long) and are subdivided for greater clarity. In addition, well-chosen historical examples bring relevant and interesting illustrations to the otherwise very academic style of the text.

A further strength of *Silent Warfare* is its ability to challenge the reader into making up his own mind on certain issues by presenting many possible theories, or by discussing both the pros and cons, without imposing a definitive truth. For example, the last chapter, “Toward a Theory of Intelligence”, despite being the shortest, is probably the most thought-provoking as it directly addresses the question of what intelligence is. Although that chapter could have easily been entitled “A Discussion of Sherman Kent’s *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy*,” it is rich in interesting questions and hypotheses on what intelligence really means and whether it should be seen as a science in itself.

Some previous book reviews have mentioned the somewhat American ethnocentric bias to the evidence presented by the authors, but that arguable bias is not detrimental to the overall quality of the book nor is it a hidden bias, the preface stating clearly that *Silent Warfare*, written by two Americans, was born out of a course taught at the University of Chicago and that “many of the examples found in the book are drawn from the British and American intelligence experiences”. (p. vii) In fact, the authors seem to have put a lot of effort into remaining as objective as possible, hence the textbook style and structure. On a few rare occasions they do, however, seem to take a position, such as when presenting arguments in favour of human intelligence over technological means of intelligence-gathering (pp. 33-37) or when pointing out that much of the criticism directed against covert actions would have been more properly directed against the foreign policy they served. (p. 146)

Another very interesting section of *Silent Warfare* is the twelve-page discussion on “Intelligence Failure and Surprise.” The authors discuss the distinction between types and causes of failure and also present so-called “solutions” to the problem of intelligence failure. (pp. 69-73) True to their academic approach, Shulsky and Schmitt start by defining the term failure before exploring possible solutions, either institutional (establishing a devil’s advocate agency) or intellectual (improving thought processes). They end the section by drawing our attention to the mirror-imaging error under which, for example, American intelligence analysts are, for cultural reasons, deemed more likely than other analysts to understand and predict the actions of others on the basis of what they would do under similar circumstances. (p. 73) Had the book been written after 11 September 2001, the authors could have easily gone one step further and suggest that such a mirror-imaging error was responsible for the intelligence failure behind the attacks, as American analysts were unable to imagine how someone could possibly board a plane and fly it into a building, failing to consider that many terrorists do not think like Americans and do not give their life the same value or importance.

Despite the fact that it would have been greatly enhanced by the inclusion of a bibliography, *Silent Warfare* is without a doubt today’s standard for those wanting to understand or be introduced to the world of intelligence. It provides neophytes with an easily readable introduction into that world, and experienced practitioners and academics with a well-structured, comprehensive treatise to serve as an essential reference tool. But given the current international situation and the important place that intelligence has taken since September 2001, *Silent Warfare* should be a mandatory read for anyone wishing to debate or criticise intelligence operations, agencies or policies.

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