

A review of intelligence for an age of terror (treverton, 2009).

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Introduction

This book by Treverton (2009) is argued here to be a vitally important area of work that looks specifically at the way in which the use of intelligence has naturally had to change as a result of modern society. Interestingly, although there is a clear aim not to apportion blame specifically for the recent atrocities, the author indicates that he feels there is a link between the United States and their flawed approach to intelligence and the high profile terror attacks that have taken place in the US. Significantly, the author is very careful not to apportion blame or finger point and maintains a balanced and critical approach when trying to establish a link and to look at the role of intelligence.

Main Arguments Presented

In this book, the author actually goes on to break down the failures, in order to try to identify the impact that the specific shortcomings are having on the magnitude and nature of the target of the threats. He recognises in this analysis that, in many cases, the intelligence approaches are enshrined in the Cold War security approaches of looking at the organisation and the tactical decisions of the intelligence offerings, rather than focusing on the actual threats that are being faced in the current climate (Riley et al 2005).

One of the main aspects of the book which provides added value to the information that is being presented is that, although the author spends time identifying the failings, he also spends some considerable time looking at the way in which the changes he suggests could be implemented, in practice. As a professional with experience in the field, this shows and adds considerable

value to what would otherwise be a potentially academic discussion.

In order to achieve this, the author takes a very pragmatic view, with the initial stage being to look at the nature of the risks that are looking at being targeted from intelligence operations. He states that recognising the threats is the first step towards then being able to recognise the way these should be handled. It is this pragmatic approach which looks at both the practical reality and the academic study that makes this book so informative in the area of intelligence being used in the terror context.

The author follows themes and after identifying them he then goes on to look at how intelligence should be reformed to deal with the modern challenges.

In order to identify the best way to deal with intelligence and to look at the reform of intelligence culture, there is a need first to consider the actual route of the threat and where it emanates from. One underlying argument and theme which is presented by the author here and which adds particular value to the discussion, in the opinion of the reviewer, is to look at the role of the nation state as being at the root of the changing dynamic. For example, during the Cold War, the focus of terror attacks was typically nation states and as such the intelligence gathering focussed on these entities. As time has passed, the nation states have become much more than simply target areas. Nation states can often offer a great deal of information that adds to the knowledge and understanding of the general issues of intelligence.

Increasingly however in the modern context, the non-state actors play a vitally important role and it is argued by the author here that much of the role of the modern intelligence officer is to look at understanding the distinctions and various nuances that exist within these non-state actors, in

such a way that their own motivation and actions can be better understood (p. 141)

Linked to this thread of discussion and again a vitally important aspect of the role of intelligence is that there are considerably more individuals, groups and entities that are involved in the area of intelligence gathering to prevent terrorism. With this increased number of people involved, the author places a great deal of focus on the idea that, whilst agencies may well have the technology to share information, they do not necessarily have the appropriate policies in place and therefore the underlying policies need to be reviewed, if modern challenges are going to be dealt with.

As an overall position, the author maintains that there needs to be a reasonable means of supplying information across all relevant actors and to ensure that the information which is being presented is relevant and measured, so that the correct people can react quickly and appropriately. By focusing on some of the practical difficulties faced in the current climate, it is argued here that the author gains a much higher degree of legitimacy than other academic analyses in this area may achieve; in particular, the author recognises that it is necessary to take a balance between the need to improve security, but also to provide privacy and security for individuals' information (Snowden, 2002). He notes that paying attention to legality and legitimacy is in fact increasingly important to the anti-terror efforts and that there then needs to be a total review of the policies associated with anti-terror activities as the main way of managing and combating such issues. He supports this by suggesting that factors such as encouraging intelligence authorities to create a method whereby they can share information with

other entities in a constructive and balanced manner is as important, if not more so, than the actual intelligence itself.

Conclusions

On balance, it is argued that this book presents an interesting and well informed opinion on the modern challenges facing the intelligence industry. By being an author who has practical experience in this area, it is suggested that this allows the text to gain legitimacy and also to take a more rounded view of the challenges being faced. Finally, providing practical and well backed up suggestions for the future means that this text presents real value to the area of intelligence and counter terrorist activities. It is concluded, therefore, that this is a well-balanced and informative text that fills a gap within the current understanding of the intelligence industry.

Reference

Riley et al., (2005) State and Local Intelligence in the War on Terrorism, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation

Snowden, D (2002) Complex Acts of Knowing: Paradox and Descriptive Self-Awareness, Journal of Knowledge Management, Special Issue, September.

Treverton, G. (2009). Intelligence for an Age of Terror. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.