



Why Secret Intelligence Fails

Michael A Turner

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Michael Turner argues that the root causes of failures in American intelligence can be found in the way it is organized and in the intelligence process itself. Intelligence that has gone awry affects national decision making and, ultimately, American national security. Intelligence officials are reluctant to talk about intelligence successes, claiming “the secret of our success is the secret of our success.” But these officials also shy away from talking about failures, largely because doing so would expose the failings of American intelligence and have an impact on policy consumers who may become more reluctant to accept and act on the intelligence they receive.

Rather than focusing on case studies, the book takes a holistic approach, beginning with structural issues and all dysfunctions that emanate from them. Turner explores each step of the intelligence cycle—priority setting, intelligence collection, analysis, production, and dissemination—to identify the “inflection points” within each stage that contribute to intelligence failures. Finally, he examines a variety of plans that, if implemented, would reduce the likelihood of intelligence failures.

While examining the causes of intelligence failures, Turner also explores intelligence as a critical governmental activity, making the book an excellent primer on secret intelligence. Turner writes in jargon-free prose for the informed reader interested in foreign policy and national security policy matters and brings enough depth to his subject that even experts will find this a must-read.

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