

## Book Reviews

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**Mark M. Lowenthal. *The Future of Intelligence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-15-09-52028-2. Pp. viii, 244. Paperback, £12.99.**

Mark Lowenthal is an American author, a recognized expert on, and a former practitioner of, intelligence. He is the President and CEO of the Intelligence & Security Academy, LLC, a national security education, training and consulting company, as well as an Adjunct Professor at the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences at Johns Hopkins University. From 2002-2005, he served as the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence (ADCI) for Analysis and Production and also as the Vice Chairman for Evaluation on the National Intelligence Council. Lowenthal has written on the topic of intelligence, and his work is familiar to both students and practitioners alike, his previous book, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* being currently one of the textbook introductions to the field of intelligence studies.<sup>1</sup>

According to the author, what led him to writing *The Future of Intelligence* was a 'series of changes brought about by both technology and events, all done on the midst of increased scrutiny and public knowledge' (p. vii). In his eyes, such changes will impact intelligence, and will necessitate its evolution in the forthcoming years. In the following pages, he clarifies the meaning of 'increased scrutiny' and 'public knowledge'. The former refers to the publication of intelligence, via the leaking of classified information. Lowenthal specifically mentions the Edward Snowden case. As for the latter, 'public knowledge', he notes the role of 24/7 permanent news media outlets, as well as the rise of social media, which 'requires no authentication' (p. viii). In the concluding words of the preface, the author highlights the fundamental objective he hoped to pursue in the book. He does not claim the ability to foresee the 'future'. Rather, he wishes his work to be included in a wider

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<sup>1</sup> Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (CQ Press, 2011)

conversation about 'how and where intelligence could be headed in the years ahead' (Preface, viii).

In the book's first of five chapters, entitled simply 'What this Book is About', Lowenthal proposes to define intelligence as 'the ability to conduct [...] collection and analytic activities, as well as to carry out certain operations that are different from both diplomacy and military operations'. (pp. 3-4) Collection and analytic activities imply the ability to identify needs of specific information, to collect and examine it, and to make it accessible to the consumers of intelligence, that is policy- and decision-makers as appropriate. The book's overall purpose is further elaborated on in this chapter. Lowenthal lists what he sees as the factors that pose 'challenges for the future of intelligence' (p. 4), all of which are of a geopolitical nature. He insists again that the circumstances in which these changes occur, result from the recent increase in both public knowledge and scrutiny. The first major factor of these changes is the rise of intelligence oversight by legislative bodies. (p. 7) The second one, characterised as 'more recent, more important' consists on the so-called 'War on Terror', and its subsequent strains on intelligence agencies ranging from further pressure for immediate results to ethics. (p. 8) In other words, the book constraints the focus to the intelligence services of democratic states.

Each of the following three chapters of the book deals with one of the three main categories of changes that Lowenthal had previously discussed in the conclusion of this first chapter. These are: changes in technology; the role of analysis; and, finally, issues of governance.

In the second chapter, '*Technology Vectors*', Lowenthal convincingly demonstrates that contemporary technology developments in the field of information already have a significant impact on the collection phase of the intelligence cycle, and argues that such impact is likely to increase in the foreseeable future. The democratisation of computers, as well as the development of the Internet, removed the main advantage the intelligence agencies had hitherto benefited through, namely, singular access to information. Big data and the many surrounding issues, including but not limited to privacy, are obviously among those who capture Lowenthal's focus, given the importance by which they hold in the analysis.

It is, however, the following chapter, '*Analysis Vectors*', that is arguably the strongest one. The opening sentence asserts that 'analysis is the main means by which intelligence interacts with

policy-makers'. (p. 51) This comes with little to no surprise. Indeed, the analytic phase of the intelligence cycle, more specifically its central role in the relationship between the intelligence community (IC) and decision-makers, is another topic on which the author had previously written extensively.<sup>2</sup> The arguments on the effects a never-ending increasing amount of data will (rather than *may*) have on the work of intelligence analysts are particularly convincing.

Turning to the issue governance in the next chapter, Lowenthal reminds the reader of the threats posed by the politicisation of intelligence, in other words, the need for intelligence to remain intact from the influence of policy-makers. The purpose of intelligence is to advise, by providing policy-makers with information. With regards to the interaction between intelligence and politicians in the context of democracy more specifically, Lowenthal sees parliamentary oversight as the area where 'we are more likely to see some effect from the various change vectors' previously reviewed in the book.

The purpose of the final chapter, '*Looking Ahead*', is twofold. First, it summarises the key lessons learned from the book, namely the change vectors: democratisation of intelligence; big data; cyberspace; collection; analysis; and governance. Second, Lowenthal offers his personal views on what might happen, concluding on a rather optimistic note.

The book is a fascinating read and it remains very accessible, appealing both to the more knowledgeable audience, practitioners and students among them, as well as to readers that have a more limited background in intelligence studies.

Despite this, one cannot help but to feel that some sense of unfinished business lingers. The book would have benefited from further analysis of other challenges to intelligence, current and future. For instance, in chapter one, Lowenthal does include 'more threatening transnational issues' as one of many challenges to the future of intelligence and its practitioners (p.4), but makes few references, if any, to the issue of intelligence cooperation. Throughout the book, he insists, and rightly so, on the impact big data will have on intelligence. However, while he acknowledges that private entities do practice intelligence, he offers no insights on the

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (CQ Press, 2011), pp. 149 – 201; or "The Policymaker-Intelligence Relationship" in *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (Oxford University Press), pp. 437 – 451

extent to which companies already play a role in collecting and analysing data and/or metadata. Thus, for example, he refers to Facebook to merely argue that social media endanger the cover intelligence officers need in the field, leaving the impact of the social media conglomerate otherwise unexplored.

Despite these limitations, *A Future of Intelligence* is an interesting complement to the author's preceding *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*. The author never pretended to come up with clear guidelines on the future of intelligence, but the further thoughts prompted by Lowenthal's discussion are welcome.

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