

2001

Best Truth: Intelligence in the Information Age

Dale C. Rielage

Bruce D. Berkowitz

Allan E. Goodman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Rielage, Dale C.; Berkowitz, Bruce D.; and Goodman, Allan E. (2001) "Best Truth: Intelligence in the Information Age," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 54 : No. 2 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol54/iss2/15>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Vice Admiral J. J. Blackham, and Admiral Sir Peter Abbott, written between 1995 and 1998. These provide perceptive British insights on the changing maritime dimension of our post–Cold War world and the increased roles for maneuvers and forward presence in shaping a new strategic environment. These are exactly the kinds of issues with which the U.S. armed forces are now struggling.

The essays' chief drawbacks are their brevity and what they do not say. The in-



Berkowitz, Bruce D., and Allan E. Goodman. *Best Truth: Intelligence in the Information Age*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2000. 203pp. \$22.50

The U.S. intelligence community, as it currently exists, is fundamentally flawed and must be remade. With this opening premise, Bruce Berkowitz, a senior consultant at RAND Corporation, and Allan Goodman, former dean of the Georgetown University School of Foreign

Service, present their blueprint for the future of American intelligence.

According to the authors, a trio of factors threatens to leave the intelligence community ineffective and irrelevant. First, it is no revelation that the end of the Cold War has left the intelligence commu-

nity without a single clear threat as a focus for its analytic efforts. The past emphasis on the Soviet Union offered intelligence analysts historical continuity. Change tended to be evolutionary; for example, one generation of Soviet submarines offered insights into the next. Today, however, nations and nonstate actors have unprecedented access to technology and information and with it a new capability to organize and operate rapidly across borders. These developments create the prospect of an “instantaneous threat” against the United States from entirely unexpected sources.

Second, if Carl von Clausewitz was correct in defining intelligence as “every sort of information about the enemy and his country,” fundamental changes in information management must create fundamental changes in intelligence. Berkowitz and Goodman observe that the intelligence community was created on an

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

ADMIRAL H. G. RICKOVER

sights presented are clearly worthwhile and for that very reason deserve expansion. For example, what were the working-level debates that undergirded the flag officers' presentations? The fact that the essays cover the seven-year period up to only three years ago would indicate that the issues raised with regard to the changing role of naval forces in the new century are still as far from being fully resolved in the Royal Navy as they are in the U.S. naval service. This suggests room for both an equivalent American publication and another Maritime Strategic Studies Institute paper, as both navies continue the process of rethinking naval power that collectively began in 1991.

EDWARD A. SMITH, JR.
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Washington Studies and Analysis
The Boeing Company
Arlington, Virginia

industrial model designed for the efficient production of standardized products. But today, consumers receive customized, on-demand information from their stockbrokers, news services, and on-line retailers; they expect nothing less from their intelligence suppliers. Further, intelligence products have become just one of the numerous data streams used by decision makers—and not necessarily the most important one. Americans are increasingly skeptical of “received wisdom” from authority (institutional or individual) and will “channel surf” for the intelligence support they expect.

Finally, the authors discuss the challenges posed by changes in American political attitudes toward intelligence. Where Americans once allowed intelligence agencies to be accountable to but a handful of elected officials, today they increasingly expect much more transparency to the public. Further, political realities suggest that for the foreseeable future intelligence agencies will receive no additional funding.

The likely bureaucratic answer to these challenges is to reorganize, seek efficiencies, and work more closely with the customer. However, the authors believe that seeking greater efficiency within the current intelligence model is not an effective answer. While they give the intelligence community high marks for satisfying identified customer requirements, they believe that today’s world of “instantaneous threats” and operations other than war makes it impossible for most customers to identify intelligence requirements early enough to permit the intelligence bureaucracy to respond. Simply put, today’s structure is a recipe for always being a step behind.

The solution proposed in *Best Truth* is a transition to what Berkowitz and Goodman dub an “adaptable intelligence organization.” Ad hoc groups would address specific customer problems. Expanded use of contractors or part-time employees with specialized skills would provide expertise for unanticipated threats. Further, the authors suggest the establishment of what they call a “virtual economy” to fund the intelligence community. Major intelligence consumers would control funding dedicated to their intelligence requirements and would have the option of spending it on any intelligence organization or discipline they believe could satisfy their needs. Intelligence agencies would cease to have “lanes in the road”; any agency could propose a solution to a customer problem. One intended effect of this virtual economy would be to force government agencies out of tasks that can be performed more efficiently by the private sector. Intelligence organizations would focus on emerging technologies not yet profitable for private industry, and on unique, high-risk espionage operations that only government organs can perform.

The bottom line of this work—a design for the future U.S. intelligence community—is not particularly satisfying. The broad outline presented leaves the reader looking for more—more specifics, more examples, more justifications. In its defense, however, the book is offered as a “manifesto” and not an exhaustive study. Its value lies in the clear and insightful statement of the challenges facing the intelligence community and the questions that they raise. Although it falls short of what its title promises, *Best Truth* is thought-provoking reading for intelligence professionals and naval officers

who are interested in the challenges of the information age.

DALE C. RIELAGE

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy
Norfolk, Virginia



Peters, Ralph. *Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph?* Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole Books, 1999. 210pp. \$19.95

The introductory pages of this book are suffused with a disagreeable arrogance and condescension. Speaking of the U.S. Army in which he spent his career, Ralph Peters states that he is “loyal to it still, much as one might care for an old lover felled by drink and bad decisions.” With a metaphorical sad shake of the head but his face set nobly toward a higher truth, he sets out on a twelve-essay description of his vision of the future and the blindness of today’s military leaders. This reviewer was quite prepared for an annoying slog through a tententious book.

Yet *Fighting for the Future* turned out to be a provocative, if strident, collection of essays (published separately between 1994 and 1999). Although Peters’s intellectual arrogance does not lessen throughout, he offers many cogent arguments and observations on a variety of themes that ought not to be dismissed out of hand, even if some ultimately are not persuasive. They directly address core issues underlying many of the most difficult problems facing today’s civilian and military leadership.

Peters depicts a dark and violent future. In the opening essay, “The Culture of Future Conflict,” he argues that “future wars and violent conflicts will be shaped by the inabilities [*sic*] of governments to function as effective systems of resource distribution and control, and by the

failure of entire cultures to compete in the postmodern age. . . . Basic resources will prove inadequate for populations exploding beyond natural limits. . . . There will be fewer classic wars but more violence. . . . Intercultural struggles, with their unbridled savagery, are the great nightmare of the next century.”

The post–Cold War U.S. military is singularly unprepared to deal with this future. Politicians and military leaders alike fundamentally misunderstand this brave new world. As a result, we will “face a dangerous temptation to seek purely technological responses to behavioral challenges” and will “need to struggle against our American tendency to focus on hardware and bean counting to attack the more difficult and subtle problems posed by human behavior and regional history.” The forces we are buying today at exorbitant cost may prove unusable against actual future threats. Peters argues that against a broad range of emerging threats, new rules of engagement rather than new weapons are needed, since no nation or other entity can face us head to head in conventional terms. “We are constrained by a past century’s model of what armies do, what police do, and what governments legally can do. Our opponents have none of this baggage.”

One essay takes issue with the notion of a technologically based revolution in military affairs (RMA). Though to a degree he argues against straw men, Peters’s main point is that technological issues are secondary to understanding the human nature of future foes—no argument there. On the other hand, in another essay he claims that “current and impending technologies could permit us to reinvent warfare,” allowing us to attack instigators of violence rather than their populations. Ironically, two other essays