
Book Reviews

Thomas E. Copeland. ***Fool Me Twice: Intelligence Failure and Mass Casualty Terrorism***. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007. Pp. xxv + 292. Hbk \$75. ISBN-90-04-158456

As Sherlock Holmes once observed, it is difficult to establish why a dog *didn't* bark on a given night. Assertions by government officials that terrorist plots have been discovered and averted are now frequently greeted with suspicion. Such plots – which in at least some cases are years old and not beyond the planning stages – may be invoked opportunistically in order to justify the troubling things that governments must do in a 'war on terror'.

Thomas Copeland's book *Fool Me Twice* focuses on five cases where terrorist attacks did take place, with devastating consequences, and seeks to understand whether they might have been prevented. At a time when much of the discussion about the role of intelligence services focuses on methods of collection – interrogation techniques, rendition, warrantless electronic surveillance – his book is a useful corrective that points to the separate questions of how the information available is analysed, and whether that analysis leads to appropriate policy choices.

The book's focus is the US intelligence community and its five case studies concern attacks on US targets: the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols in 1995, the attack on the US Air Force housing complex at Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the 1998 destruction of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, DC.

The key factors examined by Copeland are failures of leadership, organizational obstacles, the volume of information available, and analytical pathologies. His book demonstrates

a close familiarity with the material, but the premise that attacks on the homeland can and should be prevented at times blinds him to the dangers of unfettered national security agencies. He argues, among other things, that the prospects for averting tragedy were reduced in every case as a result of legal restrictions on intelligence collection; this is the sort of argument that held sway in the Justice Department after September 11, where enthusiastic lawyers sought to remove any constraints on the power of the executive, but from which the Administration has been gradually retreating. Elsewhere he suggests that terrorism prevention should always be the dominant focus of any US president. Though US policy might well have been improved had President Clinton not been distracted by the Monica Lewinsky scandal in 1998, it is quite a stretch to blame the 1993 World Trade Center attack on Clinton's focus on 'economic and social issues', the Oklahoma City bombing on 'gun control and the Oslo Peace Accords', and so on (at 241).

He is on safer ground in the discussion of organizational obstacles, charting the history of turf battles between the FBI, CIA, DOD, NSA, and various other three-letter acronyms. As he notes, this was not simply a problem of horizontal sharing as between agencies, but also of vertical sharing within agencies themselves. Much has changed in this area in recent years, including the creation of the office of Director of National Intelligence, yet a more systematic transformation of the US intelligence agencies might be to separate more clearly collection from analysis. This is the structure adopted in countries such as Britain and Australia and in theory it addresses the other problems that Copeland discusses – the sheer amount of information that can be collected and the danger of missing the forest for the trees.

It should also help reduce the danger of false positives. Indeed, in a book on the failure of the United States to act on what the author asserts was adequate evidence of threats to the homeland, it is, to say the least, odd that the 2003 invasion of Iraq is not mentioned. A greater danger than a US president paying inadequate attention to terrorist threats is that he or she will simply not be believed. It is, presumably, an unintentional irony that Copeland's title is both a play on an old cliché – that to be fooled twice suggests problems of gullibility (at xi) – but also a phrase famously mangled by US president George W. Bush in September 2002 describing the threat posed by Iraq.¹ His determination not to be 'fooled again' led to the worst foreign policy decision in a generation, if not in the history of the United States.

This disconnect between what intelligence offers a leader and the choices he or she makes is hardly new: during the Second World War, Stalin is said to have ignored 84 separate warnings from his intelligence services of the German invasion that took place in June 1941.² Nevertheless Copeland's book offers a glimpse into the what-ifs of the decade in which the most powerful country on the planet suddenly began to think of itself as the most vulnerable.

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¹ 'There's a lot of talk about Iraq on our TV screens, and there should be, because we're trying to figure out how best to make the world a peaceful place. There's an old saying in Tennessee – I know it's in Texas, probably in Tennessee – that says, fool me once, shame on – shame on you. Fool me – you can't get fooled again.' President George W. Bush, 'Remarks by the President on Teaching American History and Civic Education' (East Literature Magnet School, Nashville, Tennessee, 17 September 2002), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020917-7.html>.

² B. Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa* (1973).