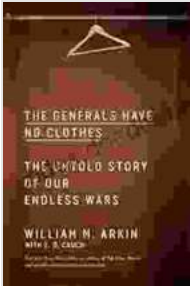# The Generals Have No Clothes: Exposing the Myth of Military Intelligence

The Generals Have No Clothes: The Untold Story of Our Endless Wars by William M. Arkin

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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In a world where the stakes are high and decisions can have life-or-death consequences, military intelligence is supposed to be the guiding light. It is the foundation upon which strategies are built, battles are planned, and nations go to war. But what happens when the intelligence is wrong?

History is replete with examples of military intelligence failures that have led to disastrous consequences. From the Trojan War to the Vietnam War, from the Bay of Pigs to the Iraq War, intelligence failures have played a significant role in shaping the course of history. The question is, why do these failures keep happening?

In his book *The Generals Have No Clothes: Exposing the Myth of Military Intelligence*, journalist Tomas C. Ries examines the systemic flaws and

biases that have led to these failures. He argues that military intelligence is often more about confirming pre-existing beliefs than about objectively assessing the evidence.

As Ries writes, "The intelligence community is a closed world, dominated by a small group of people who share a common set of assumptions and beliefs. This can lead to a 'groupthink' mentality, in which dissent is discouraged and alternative views are marginalized." The result is an intelligence system that is often more interested in providing reassurance than in challenging the status quo.

The Problem with Military Intelligence

Ries identifies several key problems with military intelligence:

- **Confirmation bias:** The tendency to seek out and interpret information that confirms pre-existing beliefs. This can lead intelligence analysts to ignore or downplay evidence that contradicts their expectations.

- **Groupthink:** The tendency for people in a group to agree with each other, even when they know that they are wrong. This can lead to a situation where dissenting views are suppressed, and the group's consensus becomes the only acceptable opinion.

- **Political interference:** The tendency for politicians and other policymakers to pressure intelligence analysts to produce intelligence that supports their preferred policies. This can lead to intelligence being distorted or even fabricated to fit the desired narrative.

These problems are compounded by the fact that military intelligence is often produced under extreme time pressure. Intelligence analysts are often forced to make snap judgments based on incomplete or unreliable information. This can lead to mistakes that have serious consequences.

Examples of Intelligence Failures

Ries provides numerous examples of intelligence failures throughout history. One of the most famous is the failure of the United States intelligence community to predict the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Despite numerous warnings, intelligence analysts failed to believe that Japan would attack the United States. The result was a devastating surprise attack that killed over 2,000 Americans and plunged the United States into World War II.

Another example is the failure of the United States intelligence community to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Intelligence analysts had long believed that the Soviet Union was a formidable military power. However, they failed to recognize the deep structural problems that were eating away at the Soviet system. As a result, the United States was caught off guard by the Soviet collapse, and it took years for the United States to adjust its foreign policy to the new reality.

More recently, the United States intelligence community failed to predict the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Intelligence analysts had underestimated the threat posed by ISIS, and they failed to recognize the group's ability to seize and hold territory. As a result, the United States was slow to respond to the ISIS threat, and the group was able to establish a caliphate that spanned large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

The Consequences of Intelligence Failures

Intelligence failures can have disastrous consequences. They can lead to military defeats, loss of life, and political instability. In some cases, intelligence failures can even trigger wars.

The consequences of the intelligence failure at Pearl Harbor were devastating. The Japanese attack killed over 2,000 Americans and plunged the United States into World War II. The war lasted for four years and claimed the lives of millions of people. It also left a lasting legacy of pain and suffering.

The consequences of the intelligence failure regarding the Soviet Union were also significant. The United States was caught off guard by the Soviet collapse, and it took years for the United States to adjust its foreign policy to the new reality. This led to a period of uncertainty and instability in the international system.

The consequences of the intelligence failure regarding ISIS were also severe. The United States was slow to respond to the ISIS threat, and the group was able to establish a caliphate that spanned large swaths of Iraq and Syria. The caliphate became a breeding ground for terrorism, and it posed a threat to the stability of the region and the world.

Reforming Military Intelligence

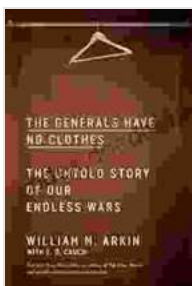Ries argues that it is time to reform military intelligence. He proposes a number of reforms, including:

- **Creating an independent intelligence agency:** Ries argues that military intelligence should be separated from the military and placed

under the control of an independent agency. This would help to reduce the influence of politics and the military on intelligence analysis.

- **Increasing transparency:** Ries argues that military intelligence should be more transparent. This would help to build public trust and make it more difficult for intelligence agencies to hide failures.

- **Investing in education and training:** Ries argues that military intelligence analysts need to be better educated and trained. This would help them to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to resist confirmation bias and groupthink.

Ries's reforms would help to address the systemic flaws that have led to intelligence failures throughout history. They would make military intelligence more objective, transparent, and accountable. This would help to prevent intelligence failures in the future and make the world a safer place.

Military intelligence is a vital tool for national security. However, it is important to be aware of the systemic flaws and biases that can lead to intelligence failures. Ries's book *The Generals Have No Clothes* is a timely and important examination of this issue. It provides valuable insights into the causes of intelligence failures and offers concrete proposals for reform. By understanding the problems with military intelligence, we can take steps to prevent them from happening in the future.

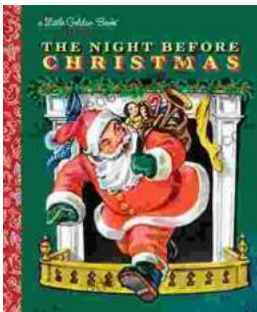**The Generals Have No Clothes: The Untold Story of Our Endless Wars** by William M. Arkin

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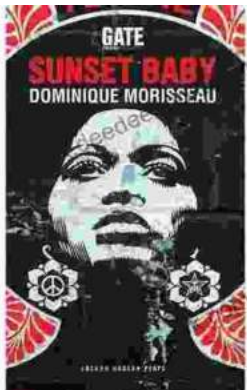|	
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