

The Art of Intelligence—Lessons from a Life in the CIA's Clandestine Service

By Henry A. Crumpton

Penguin Press, 2012

338 pp., \$27.95

ISBN: 978-1-59420-334-3

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The nexus of conflict, intelligence, government, and society is perhaps the most complex realm to navigate as a career intelligence professional. To accomplish that feat through distinguished service and then, upon retirement, concisely delineate these intersections through shared personal experience in a publication is a rare achievement. *The Art of Intelligence—Lessons from a Life in the CIA's Clandestine Service* compellingly recounts a critical period of transformation in conflict. It also presents significant analysis and reflection on the failures and successes of intelligence and what should ideally be its symbiosis with policy formulation. As Henry Crumpton demonstrates, the relationship between intelligence and policy is often messy, but it is an increasingly critical key to wise and effective decisionmaking.

As a career operations officer in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Clandestine Service, Crumpton served in diverse positions and contributed to national security in several pivotal roles. Foremost of these was his experience as a deputy to Cofer Black in the

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Counterterrorism Center, which deservedly constitutes the majority of the book. Prior formative positions, such as serving as an operations officer in Africa and working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as the deputy chief of the International Terrorism Operations section, are chronologically presented. These, along with accounts of his upbringing in Georgia, his tenacious efforts to join the CIA, and his development as a career trainee, are recounted anecdotally and with a great deal of humility. Early in chapter 2, "Training," for example, Crumpton writes, "I was the youngest in my CIA Career Trainee class, the least educated, and the least experienced. I had no military service, no foreign language, no graduate degree, no technical skill, and no professional pedigree" (p. 25). What becomes apparent through the course of *The Art of Intelligence* is how Crumpton mobilized his keen self-awareness and strong work ethic to create an evolving and downright fascinating career.

A number of narratives, particularly in chapters 3 and 4, demonstrate how the author developed as an officer by describing the recruitment of sources and collection of intelligence. In one case, Crumpton details how he and a member of the Office of Technical Services conducted an operation in Africa to recover a listening device emplaced to record the conversations of a potential informant. Unfortunately, over the span of 6 months, nothing of use was divulged by the individual, and the device had to be retrieved to close the operation. What follows is a riveting sequence of events. While it makes for great reading and is just one example, Crumpton uses the incident as a mini-case study to explain how both technical and human-based intelligence skill sets form a composite that exemplifies

the most reliable intelligence. In this particular incident, the operation would have failed without integration of both, the lesson being that no single source of intelligence provides everything needed to formulate good decisions, even at small-scale, tactical levels. Such lessons learned through the course of Crumpton's early and middle career demonstrate the cumulative preparation that led to him becoming Cofer Black's deputy and the individual responsible for the CIA's global counterterrorism operations in September 1999. This was a position through which Crumpton would have significant impact as events unfolded in 2000 and 2001.

Established in February 1986, the CIA's Counterterrorism Center was developed in response to the April 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut and the October 1983 bombing that killed 241 U.S. military personnel, also in Lebanon. Crumpton details the growing importance of the center's mission as the later 1980s, and especially the later 1990s, progressed. Of the six key geographic regions he noted once he arrived, Afghanistan was a particular focus. This, as is well known, was because of al Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan, which provided it with the sanctuary to plan attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. The East African attacks also provided Crumpton with further lessons learned regarding the role of law enforcement as practiced by the FBI and limits to how both the CIA and FBI shared information and common operating procedures:

My disappointment had to do with the FBI's exclusive focus on law enforcement, on capture and indictments of specific criminals for specific crimes. Forward-looking intelligence collection and analysis were almost

nonexistent. The FBI sought justice, not prevention. Their information was potential evidence, which they had to protect for the prosecutors to use in courts. The agents, for the most part, could not envision others outside the Department of Justice having a legitimate need for FBI-derived information. Sharing evidence as intelligence was anathema to them (p. 110).

The differing bureaucratic cultures and the disconnected approach to intelligence between the CIA and FBI were further compounded by disjointed relationships between intelligence agencies and policy decisionmakers. This is notable in Crumpton's frustration with the Clinton administration's failure to address the al Qaeda attacks on U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam as acts of war. However, it is notable that Crumpton later discusses how the United States was entering a new type of conflict that was clearly difficult to understand; the confrontation with asymmetric warfare would be further complicated by the decision to invade Iraq.

Returning to the incidents in East Africa, these, as well as the attack on the USS *Cole* in late 2000, foreshadowed problems that prevented the Intelligence Community from stopping the attacks of September 2001. On the other hand, Crumpton provides a balanced look that includes successes, such as preventing the December 1999 Millennium Plot. This event "underscored the importance of understanding Al-Qaeda's plans and intentions as an intelligence collection imperative. This meant penetrating their primary safe haven in Afghanistan" (p. 145). Crumpton then focuses chapters 9 and 10 on Afghanistan, which, along with Gary Schroen's *First In* and Gary Berntsen's *Jawbreaker*, provide perhaps

the most detailed look at CIA operations in Afghanistan from September 2001 to early 2002.

There are few authors able to provide first-hand accounts of meeting with Ahmad Shah Masood prior to September 2001 or Hamid Karzai shortly thereafter, and the portrayals of these and other events are cogent and well written. Furthermore, Crumpton's professional experience and interactions were far-ranging. Concerning technical innovations, he and his close associates have had an impact on equipment used in current operations, both conventional and unconventional. He describes the increased incorporation of Geographic Information Systems into targeting, which in the Intelligence Community is highly significant, and also his involvement with the development of the Predator from a collection platform to a weaponized one with Hellfire missiles. Despite the contentious debate surrounding drones, Crumpton indicates that had this platform contained weapons earlier, Osama bin Laden could have been targeted in the summer of 2000 when he was viewed through the video stream provided by a Predator over Tarnak Farm in Kandahar: "We had Bin Laden in our electrical-optical sights, but we had no realistic policy, no clear authority, and no meaningful resources to engage the target with lethal speed and precision. It was all sadly absurd" (154–155). Despite this missed opportunity and the obvious frustration in Crumpton's narrative, it is possible that had he not taken the next step in his career, many of the important lessons learned from an intense 3-year period (1999–2002) might have been scattered. Fortunately, this was not the case as the publication of *The Art of Intelligence* indicates.

In 2002, Crumpton attended the School of Advanced International Studies at The Johns Hopkins University to examine public policy. Through this experience, due to having time and room to reflect, the analysis provided in *The Art of Intelligence* is thought-provoking and it deserves a wide readership. The author's desire to further expand his education is also demonstrated by another influential individual in U.S. national security, U.S. Special Operations Command's Admiral Bill McRaven, who completed his study, *Special Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare Theory and Practice*, while at the Naval Postgraduate School. Perhaps there is irony in that Crumpton directly contributed to, and McRaven oversaw, the eventual demise of Osama bin Laden. While perhaps not a direct result of furthering their education, it is likely that their greater contributions to the United States are a result of being afforded time to reflect on how operations and policy must work together to more effectively achieve national security.

The Art of Intelligence is a major contribution and, when carefully considered by the reader, it reveals how Henry Crumpton provided both a positive example and a lifetime of dedication to his country. The reflection and analysis the author gives to this, as to most of his recounted operations, demonstrates the book's edifying value. In sum, this may indicate that the art of intelligence itself is learning from experience and having the humility and perseverance to honestly assess and adapt to change not only on an individual level but also on a strategic level as a nation. [PRISM](#)