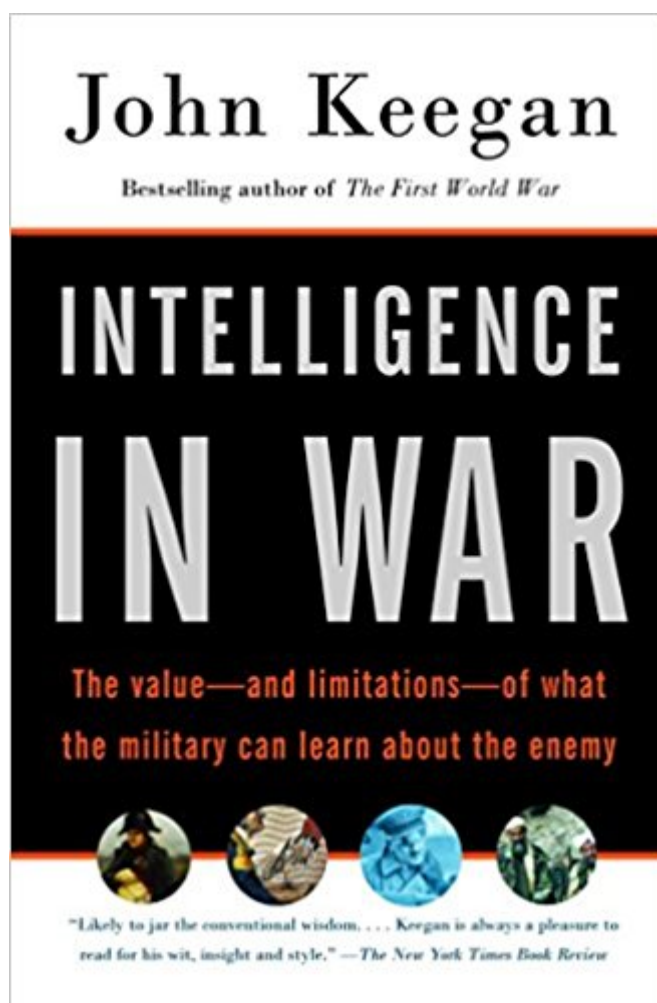


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# Intelligence In War: Knowledge Of The Enemy From Napoleon To Al-Qaeda



## Synopsis

A masterly look at the value and limitations of intelligence in the conduct of war from the premier military historian of our time, John Keegan. Intelligence gathering is an immensely complicated and vulnerable endeavor. And it often fails. Until the invention of the telegraph and radio, information often traveled no faster than a horse could ride, yet intelligence helped defeat Napoleon. In the twentieth century, photo analysts didn't recognize Germany's V-2 rockets for what they were; on the other hand, intelligence helped lead to victory over the Japanese at Midway. In *Intelligence in War*, John Keegan illustrates that only when paired with force has military intelligence been an effective tool, as it may one day be in besting al-Qaeda.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Sir John Keegan, the defense editor for "The Daily Telegraph" and one of the foremost military historians writing in English today, has turned his attention to an important but regularly overlooked topic--the role of military intelligence in combat operations. He argues that political intelligence is an ancient craft that goes back almost as far as recorded history, but military intelligence has until the

last 200 hundred years or so had limited impact on the battlefield due to the technological challenges of getting information to a commander and then to units in the field. Intelligence was mainly the work of scouts. In a series of case studies starting with the naval operations of Lord Nelson, Keegan argues: "Intelligence, however good, is not necessarily the means to victory; that ultimately, it is force, not fraud or forethought, that counts" (p. 334). Two of the most striking examples he uses are the battles of Crete in 1940 and Midway in 1942. At Crete, the British had accurate signals intelligence telling them what the Germans were going to do and they still lost. At Midway, the Americans had equally good information on what the Japanese intended, but random chance was the key to U.S. victory. The American planes that sank three of the four Japanese carriers were lost and found the enemy fleet by accident at a time when their defenses were ill prepared for another attack. These arguments are important. We use this book at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College where I currently teach. Keegan's ideas are revisionist but also seem straight forward. The title is accurate. This book focuses only on military intelligence in war. The subtitle is a bit misleading. There is next to no mention of al-Qaeda in the book. Keegan is an exceptionally easy read, but he raises some significant questions which is always a good combination.

This is a very diffuse book taking far too much verbiage to make the authors point. The admiral Nelson Mediterranean debacle made a point but it should have been made in a few pages. Likewise Stonewall's valley adventures could have occupied

I think Keegan does a phenomenal job comparing/analyzing the differences between intelligence, determination, will, and force. The only part I disagreed with was his analysis of subversion. He does a solid job analyzing the conflicts he already had, but failed to see the impact and effectiveness of subversion throughout the last 50 years. He honed his scope too thin to really see the impact of subversion (especially with the analysis being near its beginning).

After listening to this audiobook, I began to appreciate the tendency to have unrealistic expectations of military intelligence. While it's true that many great historical battles were won in large part due to superior intelligence, most of the time nobody has much of an intelligence edge. Further, even when there is timely and valuable information, it is often made available within a set of mainly inaccurate data.

John Keegan's 2003 "Intelligence in War" is a well-written, if limited, survey of several battle and campaigns to determine what if any impact intelligence had on their outcome. Keegan cites Admiral Lord Nelson's pursuit of Napoleon's fleet, Stonewall Jackson's famous Valley campaign, and the World War II battles of Crete, Midway, and the North Atlantic, among others. His concluding argument seems to be that the availability of good intelligence in and of itself does not determine the outcome of conflict as much as the ability of warriors to turn intelligence into some decisive advantage on the battlefield. As Keegan notes, the outcome of battle may be as much dependent on sheer chance as anything else. Keegan's book sparked some vigorously dissenting opinions on the value of his argument, as can be seen in other reviews. It has been noted before that Keegan's undoubted powers of description are sometimes stronger than his ability to interpret their meaning. To the extent that Keegan breaks no new intellectual ground in this book, those dissenting opinions are perfectly valid. The effect of "Intelligence in War" to strip away some of the mystique of intelligence in war is likely of value for the general reader, as opposed to the dedicated student of conflict or intelligence. His selected examples place intelligence firmly in context in the chaos that accompanies battle. His point, that intelligence can facilitate success but does not mandate it, may be far less obvious to the general reader than to the dedicated student. Keegan's prose, as always, is imminently readable. His accounts of the Battle of the North Atlantic and of Crete, including his analysis of the outcomes, are superbly concise, with much nuance. Keegan includes an excellent selection of maps and photographs. This book is recommended to the general reader looking for an entertaining discussion of just how intelligence can fit into the bigger picture in conflict. Dedicated students of intelligence in warfare will find more challenging fare elsewhere.

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