

**Book Review**  
**By**  
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**Michael Morell, *The Great War of Our Time, The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism from Al Qaida to ISIS* (New York: Hachette Book group, 2015), 362**

The book titled "*The Great War of Our Time, The CIA's Fight Against Terrorism from Al Qaida to ISIS*" written by Michael Morell, former deputy director of the US's Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), is a mix of his memoir and assessments of regarding the institutional efforts of CIA in the fight against Al-Qaida as seen from the author's time of serving in the agency. The book also explains the author's views of some other political issues such as the Arab Spring, Benghazi episode of 2012 that resulted in the death of the US ambassador in Libya, dealings with Pakistan post Abbottabad raid in May 2011 and reasons for failure of American policy in the Middle East. The author's memoir also describes the relationship between the executive and the intelligence branches of the US government.

The book contains fourteen chapters and all the chapters deal with US policy and experience regarding countering its main enemy, the Al-Qaida organization. In the initial chapters, Morell highlights the buildup of the Al-Qaida threat for the US in the 1990s and challenges the main stream view, based upon his CIA experience during the time, that US was not aware of this buildup. The flaw, however, according to the author lay with the institutional lack of importance given to the terrorism related issues prior to 9/11. Michael Morell reflects on the events surrounding 9/11 events. He gives an interesting account from his position as the President George W. Bush daily intelligence briefer for one year till 2002.

The initial chapters also cover the US administration's response to 9/11 events both internal and external regarding Afghanistan.

In chapter five titled the "imperfect storm" the author discusses the intelligence failure regarding Iraq's alleged WMD program and policy implications owing to the wrong analysis. Morell describes the efforts within CIA to correctly analyze intelligence data, and a correct analysis made for US policy makers regarding Iraq's WMD program, Saddam regime's alleged links to Al-Qaida and parallel analysis

efforts in the Vice President's Cheney office which were determined to implicate the Iraqi leadership. The author dismisses the claims that the hardliners in the Bush administration forced the US intelligence community to take the position it did on WMDs as there were significant dissenting voices within the CIA and the US Department of Energy (DOE) at the time. The author also explained institutional reasons for the failure of the final analysis in the CIA regarding Saddam's alleged nuclear activities.

The subsequent chapters deal with the events leading to identification and killing of Osama Bin Laden, the chief of Al-Qaida organization in Pakistan. The chapter briefly describes US efforts to repair its ties with Pakistan and its powerful Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) organization post OBL raid. The book also includes chapters regarding the Arab Spring, the failure of US intelligence community to generate a warning despite several indicators from the region and conducive environment the Arab spring created for Al-Qaida's regeneration in Middle East. The concluding chapters include the explanation of Benghazi incident that resulted in the death of the US ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens in September, 2012 and ISIS organization.

In surveying the issues covered, Morell's book does not add much to the existing knowledge on the topics discussed in the book. There are however some interesting observations which the author has made regarding the Arab Spring. They reflect the view of US intelligence community that the uprisings were a strategic surprise for the US and the West. Morell is of the view that the Arab spring resulted in strengthening forces of political Islam and Al-Qaida in the region.

The chapter on OBL raid repeats a familiar story that it was a unilateral US military operation and was a strategic surprise for Pakistan. The author goes on to narrate his version of planning sessions in the US regarding the preparation of attack and contingency plans if the things didn't go as planned. There are sufficient reasons to question the author's version. Through holding an important position in the CIA, he would be unlikely to be aware of all the details. Moreover, President Obama's address to the nation on the eve of May 02, 2011 revealing the news of Bin Laden's death appreciated Pakistani cooperation, in the operation, which contradicts author's claim that this was a unilateral US operation.

There is also less substance in the discussion on ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Sham) or IS (Islamic State) organization as one chapter is dedicated towards the subject covering the issue only broadly.

The book is worth studying from the angle of relationship between policy makers in the executive branch and the intelligence community in the United States. It also reflects the adaptability of the CIA as an organization to new challenges and how a critical approach towards improving the analysis helps the institution. The book might encourage researchers and analysts to dwell on this relationship further.

Michael Morell conclusion that “this war is not over yet” depicts the likely trajectory of the US policy towards Middle East. With rising support for political Islam in the Muslim world in general and Middle East in particular it seems that US will remain engaged in the region for the foreseeable future.

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