In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones. (Oxford University Press, 2013) 308 pp., endnotes, bibliography, illustrations, index.

Reviewed by John Ehrman and Jason Manosevitz

Sometimes an author's idea for a book just doesn't work out. So it is with Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's new book, *In Spies We Trust*, a history of the "rise, decline, and obsolescence" of the Anglo-American intelligence partnership. Jeffreys-Jones, a prominent English historian of the United States and author of *The CIA and American Democracy* (1989) and other histories of intelligence,[a] states that US-UK "intelligence cooperation was the main espionage liaison story of the twentieth century." Now it has fallen apart, however, because Britain's decline made the partnership too unequal, the Cold War's end erased the need for close cooperation, and America became "unBritish" in composition and outlook. (4, vii) Instead, Jeffreys-Jones argues, the relationship will be replaced by partnerships centered through the UN and EU. In making this claim, he has produced an interesting book, but also one that is flawed and ultimately unconvincing.

In Spies We Trust is useful in two ways. The first is that Jeffreys-Jones provides an overview of how the US-UK intelligence relationship developed. He reminds us that modern US intelligence began with the creation of the Office of Naval Intelligence in 1882 and the US Army's Military Intelligence Division in 1885, during the same period in which the European powers set up their professional intelligence services. (7) Jeffreys-Jones takes pains to counter the myth that the United States is much less experienced in intelligence than the Europeans. "At its inception, American intelligence was no copycat operation," he notes, "but an independent creation with virtues of its own." (19) Jeffreys-Jones also reminds us that US-UK intelligence cooperation began earlier than is generally recognized, starting in the period of US neutrality during World War I, and was driven by a sense of shared values among the governing elites of both countries.

Jeffreys-Jones also does well when he reviews the drivers of the Anglo-American intelligence relationship during the Second World War and the Cold War. He weaves large events into his narrative, describing not just wartime cooperation but also Soviet penetrations of both services, joint efforts to overthrow Iran's Mosaddeq, British intelligence advice to Washington about Vietnam, and how the 1970s investigations into the CIA led to document releases that exposed British involvement in covert operations.

Throughout, Jeffreys-Jones places the intelligence relationship in the context of US-UK diplomatic history, and shows that they move together, constantly shifting as each side does its best to exploit the other. For London, sharing intelligence with Washington makes Britain a valuable partner for the United States and helps compensate for England's diminished power. Washington, in turn, gets a partner that seldom refuses to do its bidding. Both countries, Jeffreys-Jones notes, have clung to the relationship, if only out of familiarity.

As good as these points are, we do not find Jeffreys-Jones's arguments convincing. He concentrates on espionage and human intelligence operations, but he largely ignores cooperation between NSA and GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters), arguably the most important intelligence relationship in the world. It is odd, too, that Jeffreys-Jones has no substantial discussion of how the United States and Britain work closely with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in the Five Eyes partnership, which enhances each country's SIGINT programs and reinforces political ties.

The book also reveals little new information, as Jeffreys-Jones relies almost exclusively on secondary

a. These include *American Espionage: From Secret Service to CIA* (1977), *Cloak and Dollar: A History of American Secret Intelligence* (2002), and *The FBI: A History* (2007).

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sources. Many readers may wish for more depth, particularly about how the US and British intelligence services worked with or against each other. The book is also marred by astonishing errors that cast doubt on the quality of the publisher's fact checkers and author's grasp of US history. "After the carnage at the Battle of Appomattox," Jeffreys-Jones tells us, "Lincoln had issued his proclamation freeing the slaves in lands conquered by Union armies." (By Civil War standards, the casualties experienced by both sides at Appomattox in April 1865 were minor, fewer than a thousand killed and wounded. The Emancipation Proclamation was signed in January 1863.) A few lines later, he dates the creation of the Department of Justice to 1970. (A typo, perhaps? It was created in 1870.) (6)

That is only one of problems that hurt the credibility of Jeffreys-Jones's conclusions. One reason he gives for the weakened US-UK intelligence relationship is that Washington, enmeshed in low-level conflicts around the globe, no longer needs a generalist partner but, instead, many specialized ones—"a web of bilateral relationships," as Jeffreys-Jones puts it. (185) He also believes that the growth of the US Hispanic and other immigrant populations has weakened Washington's Atlanticist orientation and made it more open to other associations.

Jeffreys-Jones might also have noted that the huge intelligence machinery the United States has built since 9/11 has made Washington less dependent on the British. Conversely, he argues, the British learned from Iraq that being Washington's junior partner could lead to disaster. Given these new realities, Jeffreys-Jones concludes, London should develop new partnerships of its own, especially with the emerging multilateral EU intelligence structure, to protect against the regional and cyber threats that are Britain's main problems today.

For Britain to cut back its intelligence relationship with the United States on the basis of Jeffreys-Jones's analysis, however, would be a strange move. Media reports indicate that the intelligence relationship with the British—both in espionage and analysis—is as strong and successful as ever, especially in counterterrorism. Similarly, recent press revelations about electronic intelligence gathering suggest that the US-UK SIGINT partnership not only remains close, but is greater in scope and more effective than during any previous period.

This disconnect between what Jeffreys-Jones sees as the state of Anglo-American intelligence ties and the reality is what ultimately undermines *In Spies We Trust*. To be sure, the relationship has been marked by power imbalances, mutual exploitation, and blunders; at the same time, however, common political and economic interests have enabled it to endure. Both sides may have good reasons to diversify their liaison relationships, but neither has any compelling reason to abandon the other.

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