Hacker, Influencer, Faker, Spy: Intelligence Agencies in the Digital Age
Robert Dover (C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2022), 342 pages, notes, index.

Reviewed by Graham Alexander

Professor and author Robert Dover's *Hacker, Influencer, Faker, Spy: Intelligence Agencies in the Digital Age* seeks to frame itself as a meditation on intelligence work in the digital age. Dover's analysis is broken into 10 chapters that review aspects of how enhanced technological capabilities have changed the landscape with ever-increasing speed. He argues that these capabilities will have serious implications on culture, security, and public perceptions of both intelligence agencies and the governments that administer them. Dover's prose is vintage ivory tower: lecture-hall style, he bounces across a range of topics with no obvious connection, often using unnecessarily complex terminology.

Dover also occasionally commits factual errors or uses terms such as the "Global North," whose meaning is unclear. In a manner reminiscent of Hegel, however, incisive and thought-provoking commentary occasionally shines through cracks in the clouds. The result is that *Hacker, Influencer, Faker, Spy* proves a worthy read for intelligence professionals and policymakers with the diligence and curiosity to plow through its contradictions and often winding prose.

Dover has obviously read and thought extensively on intelligence but his writing is often unnecessarily complex or imprecise. He writes in one 38-word sentence, for example, "It is the process of intelligence that has historically led to the presence of monocultures, and the way in which the security imperative has led to reinforcing patterns of recruitment, in varying intensities across often highly distinct organizations." (62)

At other points, he seems confused on terminology or unfamiliar with established facts. He references Kim Philby on several occasions, for example, calling him an "infamous double agent" when Philby was always a Soviet penetration of British intelligence. (179) He claims later that Richard Grenell was President Donald Trump's final director of national intelligence; it was John Ratcliffe. (196) Other claims are less obviously false but still dubious. At one point, Dover argues that most Hollywood studios depicted the "global war on terror" as a clash of civilizations and that this allowed the Bush administration to push more aggressively for antiterror legislation. (243)

Dover's work clearly would have benefited from better editing. Dismissing it altogether, however, constitutes a bridge too far. Indeed, Dover's distance from the intelligence trade allows him to avoid undue focus on tactical concerns. He instead ponders wider societal, cultural, and technological trends borne from big data and the concomitant growth of collection capabilities. Dover is uncomfortably credible when discussing how various events such as the Iraq wars have soured public perception of experts and widened the perceived gulf between ruling elites and the ruled. (49) In a separate passage, Dover hits another bullseye when he urges more reflection on the possibility that the same enhanced intelligence capabilities that many citizens support against accepted enemies are available for use against less obviously antithetical political ideologies. (269) "The promise of the liberalization of official information has not been realized in practice," Dover writes, "and the ability to monitor and counter those investigating government activities has increased." (183)

Dover concludes humbly that there is "a better way for intelligence—but no obvious pathway to it." (314) The conclusion may be anodyne but it is nevertheless appropriate. For all its faults, *Hacker, Influencer, Faker, Spy* is a worthy piece of intelligence literature for those already versed in the genre. This is not because it provides answers, but because it invites readers to think about how intelligence agencies in the West must adapt and work within the rule of law during an age of rapid technological change. (For Hayden Peake's perspective on this book, go to Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf, beginning on page 67.)

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The reviewer: Graham Alexander is the pen name of a CIA officer in CSI's Lessons Learned Program.