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Emergent Intelligence
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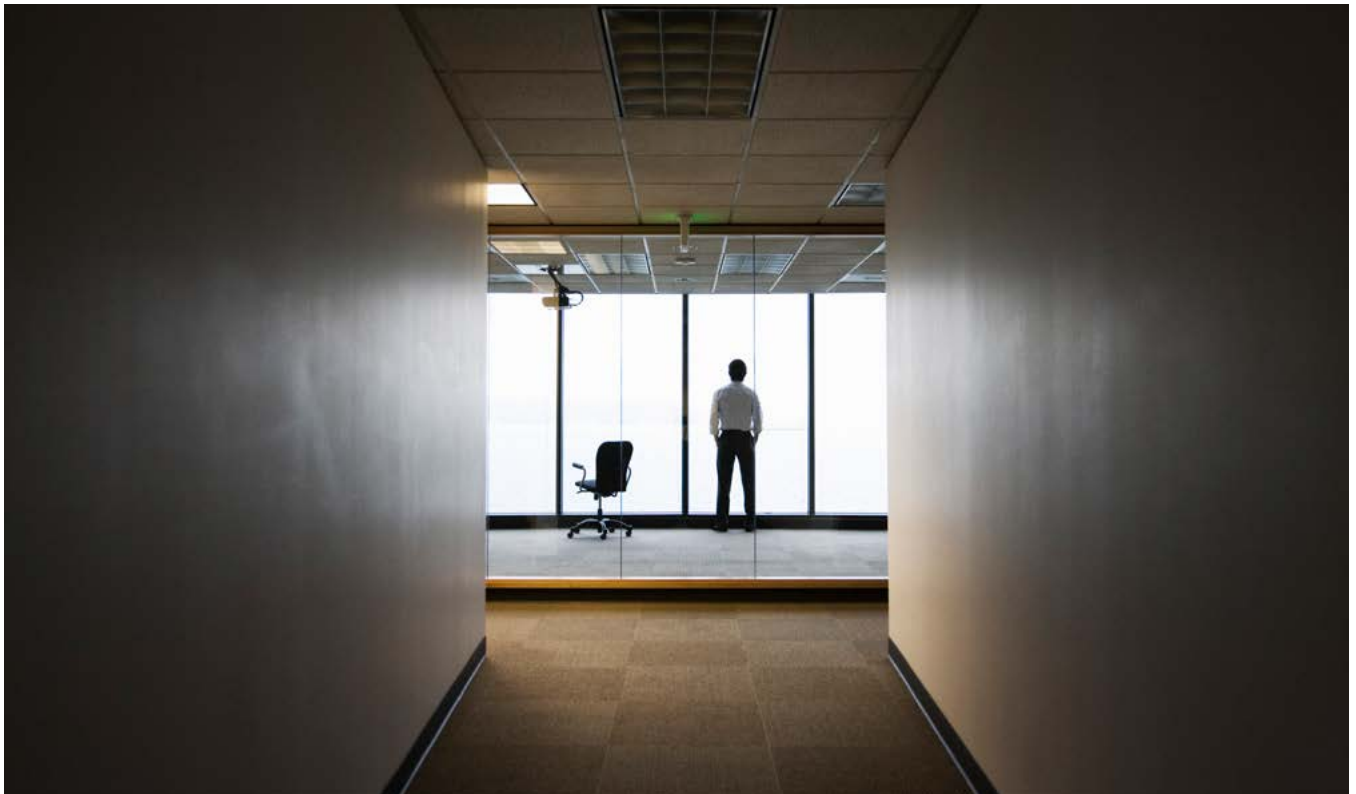
Secure, in–office, remote work in the IC differs significantly from remote telework in the private sector. (Envato/Mint_Images)

The Solitary Intelligence Officer

Reflections on Secure Remote Work

John Mohr

John Mohr is a Defense Department analyst with 20-plus years of experience in the IC, including as an Air Force intelligence officer. He also teaches intelligence studies at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Working from Afar

Can intelligence analysts work effectively in a secure remote environment that is geographically removed from their team by hundreds of miles? I have spent the last three years demonstrating this construct can work, as a senior intelligence officer in Colorado as part of a Washington, DC-based analytic team. My arrangement—secure remote work—is different from telework from home, which has dominated conversations about what workers, consumers, and employers learned about work during the pandemic.

Secure remote work entails an officer working independently in a remote secure office as a member of a consolidated team that is typically in an organization's headquarters building. Most commonly this would comprise remote officers working for organizations in Washington, DC, but might also apply to civilian intelligence personnel assigned to the military's combatant commands that include locations in Europe and across the United States. Some people are skeptical this arrangement can be effective. They argue the distance is too far to overcome, that remote officers will abuse the construct, or that a remote officer will ultimately become an out-of-sight, out-of-mind liability that is injurious to the mission. These are fair concerns, but too often reflect a legacy mindset that predates the shift to remote work and may not be informed by data.

This article offers one case study with a simple takeaway: My experience is evidence that secure remote work can succeed in the right situation and this newfound flexibility has extended my public service career and contribution to the mission. I will detail my reflections working remotely in a non-supervisory senior analytic position, including observations on reasons for success, the challenges I have encountered, and some factors managers should consider when evaluating remote work requests.

A Neglected Topic

Secure remote work in the Intelligence Community has been mostly neglected in the literature of pandemic lessons-learned. Most of the discussion has focused on the efficacy of telework from home, including whether IC officers can work in such a construct. Two prominent examples—RAND's prescient 2018 pre-pandemic report and MITRE's post-pandemic assessment—discussed how to transition IC officers to a telework-from-home environment and navigate everything from the security to legal issues. These studies offer some transferable lessons for secure remote work, such as ensuring accountability of an officer, but they do not address the solitary intelligence officer working in a secure remote work construct.[1]

In recent years, the IC has started to signal some openness to this type of remote flexibility. The National Intelligence Strategy issued in 2023 emphasized greater workplace flexibility as part of the IC's goal to recruit, develop, and retain talent.[2] Then-Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines echoed this in her workforce engagements, saying the IC is increasing telework and other workplace flexibilities, in part to compete with the private sector for talent.[3] The National Security Agency has reportedly explored the merits of secure remote work, and in 2022 the Defense Intelligence Agency's chief of staff talked about the "untapped potential" of secure remote telework, again in the context of reducing attrition.[4]

Many managers have not embraced the greater flexibility the National Intelligence Strategy called for. This opposition reflects an old-fashioned conviction that maintains an officer must be in close physical proximity to a team to be fully effective. I experienced this first hand before the pandemic when I interviewed for and was offered several jobs, but one by one, I learned the offices would not agree to secure remote work. Imagine being deemed the most qualified in a competitive job search, but not qualified enough to work remotely. I have colleagues, including among the most capable officers I know, who have faced similar rejections. And I have other colleagues, at senior and junior levels who have thrived in secure remote work constructs. Managers may have had valid concerns about accommodating secure remote work, but these reflexive denials are examples of the change in thinking and culture still required.

In reality, the day in the life of a solitary intelligence officer is not that different from an officer working in-person at an agency's headquarters. I work in a secure office facility (a SCIF) and start my workday before sunrise so I can mostly align with Washington's workday. My first communication of the day is a "good morning" message over our work unit's

Seven Commandments for Successful Hybrid Work

In 2022, Wharton Business School professor and business author Adam Grant outlined seven commandments for employees that split time in an office and at home. These themes have helped me thrive in a remove work construct as I have acclimated to working in an office separated by more than 1,600 miles from my consolidated team:

1. Thou shalt coordinate

2. Thou shalt set communication norms

3. Thou shalt be multimodal—a reference to using various communication tools

4. Thou shalt relaunch, which centers on embracing work flexibility

5. Thou shalt not send mixed messages

6. Thou shalt overcommunicate

7. Thou shall pilot and review, which calls for a trial period for remote work to allow for feedback and adjustment

(For more, see Jessica Stillman, "Adam Grant's 7 Commandments for Successful Hybrid Work," *Inc.* (June 16, 2022)

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instant messaging application, one of several critical technological tools that keeps me connected. The rest of the day proceeds very similarly to others on my team: email triage, skimming overnight intelligence developments, reviewing draft intelligence products my team produces, and attending meetings. Many colleagues with whom I engage are surprised to learn that I'm not collocated in their same headquarters building after repeated communication.

The obvious difference, of course, is that I am doing these things from afar with a team that is consolidated. Any communication I have with the team is virtual, whether via video phone, email, or instant messaging. Feedback or mentoring I provide to analysts I deliver virtually. My management provides me feedback virtually. I attend meetings virtually, including a weekly analytic production meeting that I lead.

These are downsides, but they are not debilitating. There is no substitute for in-person communication, especially when delivering tough feedback to an analyst. I also cannot deliver a snap, in-person briefing to the Pentagon or on the Hill unless a virtual option exists. And I am missing out on the more subtle human interactions that are critical to team building and rapport, such as attending a team member's going-away celebration or discussing last night's sporting event in the coffee line. Any officer working remotely would be wise to read organizational psychologist Adam Grant's research on hybrid work, starting with his seven commandments for success that, unsurprisingly, all center on communication.

Addressing Skeptics

Skeptics will point to these things as insurmountable hurdles and further question whether an officer working from afar can be accountable in the same manner a local employee can be. Senior managers should factor in accountability into these decisions, just as they do for any other tough decisions managers face. My management laid out clear expectations to me that I bore the responsibility to make the arrangement work and if I fell short, the arrangement would terminate. This was good incentive, but also reduced their risk by placing strict boundaries on the arrangement and treating the first year as a trial phase of sorts.

Secure remote work also brings some hidden upsides, including what the private sector often describes as workplace resiliency and business continuity. This can include extending work coverage by distributing employees across time zones—the "follow the sun" model—or having a remote employee in the office, when the consolidated team is facing inclement weather. And in the event of a national emergency like a terrorist

attack, remote workers in other cities could provide some continuity.

Officers considering doing secure remote work should be hyper conscious that they must consistently strive to overcome the distant nature of their work. This is magnified for me because I am in a leadership position and am terribly introverted. Having daily contact with the other analytic leaders in my work area and making myself accessible to management help close this distance. Working to foster a culture in which analysts feel empowered to reach out to me unprompted also helps. Our office leadership instant message chatroom, which was in place before I took the job, is a hyper efficient way for us to distribute work or check the status of a task. And I make periodic visits to Washington to work with the team in person, hear their ideas and concerns, and receive feedback from management and the team, which is imperative to my arrangement.

We should also acknowledge that it takes a certain type officer to succeed in a secure remote construct. Good candidates are officers who are independent, conscientious, and experienced. This experience would ideally include knowledge on a particular portfolio and time working in Washington. This last point—understanding the fabric of Washington—is critical because these first-hand insights into beltway dynamics is invaluable so that a remote employee

understands the things their team is doing, whether delivering a briefing to a National Security Council meeting or battling traffic on the beltway.

Remote officers are also more likely to thrive if the offices they join have sound processes and high performing teams. This includes management that is willing to accept some risk and accommodate a remote request. My supervisor has been a stalwart supporter and has remarked that she is proud that we are helping to pioneer something we think is critical for the IC's future. I am also surrounded by high caliber branch senior analysts who work hand in hand with our line analysts.

Recommendations

I offer several recommendations that would help streamline a secure remote work process and help managers and their remote employees succeed.

Formalize Processes

First, agencies need to formalize the process for obtaining secure remote jobs, including stating in job advertisements whether they are remote eligible or establishing criteria for remote request approvals. Not all jobs are suitable for this construct, but I believe many are, particularly in the analytic realm. Agencies should also consider whether secure remote

arrangements should be capped at a specific length or left to the discretion of managers.

Manage Physical Space

We also need to better institutionalize a system for seating at remote locations outside Washington that requires a corporate approach because office space is so closely guarded. This was among the bigger challenges I encountered when solidifying my remote arrangement. I relied on informal networking to obtain a workspace in a federally leased facility that houses mostly IT professionals. This system should also include secure locations managed by organizations for which remotes officers do not work. An example might be a CIA officer working in a secure office at an FBI field office.

Provide Training

Managers and remote work employees would benefit from additional training resources that promote best practices. Agencies should integrate a module on secure remote work into supervisor training courses to educate managers on things to consider when employees request secure remote work and how to maximize prospects for success.

Follow the Data

We need more data to help agency leaders make the best decisions about remote work accommodations. IC leaders could

initiate a study to evaluate remote secure work. This study could consider addressing several outstanding questions that I am not able to answer from my experience. These include: Could this work from a time zone in Europe or Hawaii, multiple hours ahead or behind Washington? Could this work for people in management positions, especially at more senior levels? Could this work during a prolonged crisis period, such as a NATO conflict with Russia? What are the budgetary implications of remote workers, including potential cost savings by cheaper office space outside Washington, DC? Is success dependent on an IC agency's mission or an officer's job function? And could an intelligence analytic workforce be completely distributed at different secure sites across the country or globe?

Ask the Right Question

In December 2023, I briefed a group of my agency's fellow senior intelligence officers on my remote work experience to share preliminary lessons from my first year in the construct. Their predominant reaction to my observations were "Why wouldn't this work?" This is the type of reaction I hope will become more commonplace, as other employees seek these accommodations, whether for family or other reasons. The pandemic jolted IC agencies to adapt as they balanced mission needs with employee health and safety. Officers requesting secure remote work have similarly valid reasons as they seek to continue their public service, including proximity to aging parents, children in school, spousal careers, or more practical things like cost of living or quality of life.

We need to abandon the idea that secure remote work is a radical proposition or just a pandemic gimmick. The flexibility it affords is critical for the IC's success, as it seeks to memorialize pandemic lessons-learned and improve workforce flexibility so that it can recruit and retain top talent. ∎

Endnotes

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Emergent Intelligence

Spycraft and Intelligence in the AI Era

Rachel Grunspan, Jessica D. Smith, and Elizabeth VanderVeen

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The concepts presented in this paper rely heavily on substantial advances in AI's ability to process, analyze, and combine extensive and varied datasets. Furthermore, we acknowledge that concurrent progress in other related technologies will be equally important for the success of these concepts.

Although there are currently limitations, we believe the early signs of potential in these areas warrant not only serious discussion at this time, but also the launch of concrete research and development initiatives.
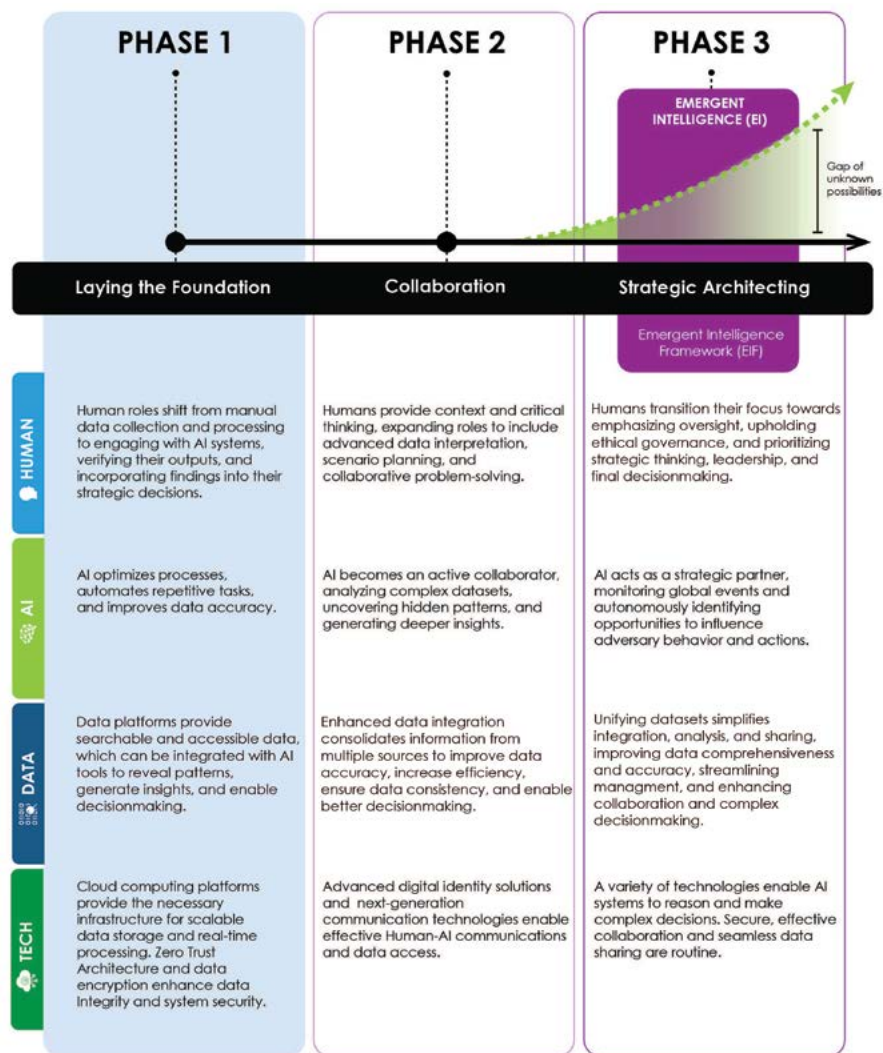
The Intelligence Community (IC) is adapting its core methodologies to meet the demands of rapid technological advancements, Artificial Intelligence (AI) in particular. For more than 80 years, the IC has relied on the intelligence cycle—a structured, methodical approach involving collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination—to support decisionmaking and safeguard national security.

Today's environment is marked by an overwhelming influx of data, rapid technological evolution, and the need for immediate response capabilities, more than what the traditional intelligence cycle was designed for. To remain effective as AI matures, intelligence organizations require a more agile framework—one that fully leverages advanced technologies like artificial intelligence alongside human expertise to generate Emergent Intelligence. (EI)

This new type of intelligence could provide policymakers with a quantifiable advantage, allowing them to make well-informed decisions based on real-time insights tailored to the complexities of the global landscape. EI represents an advanced capability to persistently shape adversary behavior while avoiding direct confrontation. This is achieved by designing subtle interventions, continuously assessing outcomes, and adapting tactics in novel ways. While traditional intelligence is often reflective of past events, EI focuses on enabling

	PHASE 1 — Laying the Foundation	PHASE 2 — Collaboration	PHASE 3 — Strategic Architecting / EMERGENT INTELLIGENCE (EI) — Emergent Intelligence Framework (EIF) — Gap of unknown possibilities
HUMAN	Human roles shift from manual data collection and processing to engaging with AI systems, verifying their outputs, and incorporating findings into their strategic decisions.	Humans provide context and critical thinking, expanding roles to include advanced data interpretation, scenario planning, and collaborative problem-solving.	Humans transition their focus towards emphasizing oversight, upholding ethical governance, and prioritizing strategic thinking, leadership, and final decisionmaking.
AI	AI optimizes processes, automates repetitive tasks, and improves data accuracy.	AI becomes an active collaborator, analyzing complex datasets, uncovering hidden patterns, and generating deeper insights.	AI acts as a strategic partner, monitoring global events and autonomously identifying opportunities to influence adversary behavior and actions.
DATA	Data platforms provide searchable and accessible data, which can be integrated with AI tools to reveal patterns, generate insights, and enable decisionmaking.	Enhanced data integration consolidates information from multiple sources to improve data accuracy, increase efficiency, ensure data consistency, and enable better decisionmaking.	Unifying datasets simplifies integration, analysis, and sharing, improving data comprehensiveness and accuracy, streamlining managment, and enhancing collaboration and complex decisionmaking.
TECH	Cloud computing platforms provide the necessary infrastructure for scalable data storage and real-time processing. Zero Trust Architecture and data encryption enhance data integrity and system security.	Advanced digital identity solutions and next-generation communication technologies enable effective Human-AI communications and data access.	A variety of technologies enable AI systems to reason and make complex decisions. Secure, effective collaboration and seamless data sharing are routine.

opportunities to shape future outcomes of complex geopolitical challenges. It is driven by real-time data analysis and continuous learning within Human-AI Teams (HMTs), which refine their strategies and insights based on evolving mission requirements and newly ingested intelligence.

HMTs consist of human experts and AI systems working together to create actionable strategies. Operating as a team of teams, HMTs with different skills sets come together to solve time sensitive or highly complex challenges for their missions. By combining AI's analytic and compute capabilities with human reasoning and judgment, HMTs deliver more effective responses, especially in environments requiring rapid adaptation and strategic foresight.

To achieve EI, a well-defined framework to guide the process is crucial. The Emergent Intelligence

Phase 1: Setting the stage for more advanced AI applications, fused datasets, and advanced technology solutions.
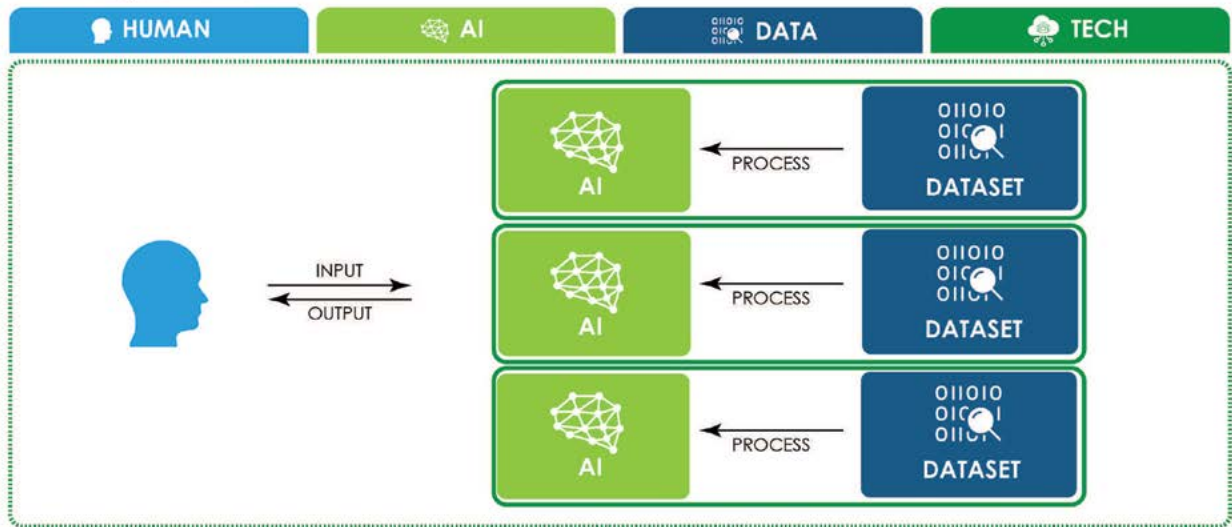
Framework (EIF) lays the groundwork to do this, converting the traditional intelligence cycle into a real-time, interconnected information exchange model, where collection, analysis, and dissemination occur concurrently and adaptively.

Three Phases of Evolution

Understanding the possibilities of EI compels us to explore how it can be realized in practice. Realizing EI involves a coordinated HMT transformation across human roles, AI capabilities, and data infrastructure. The phases outline a structured path to reshape the intelligence landscape by integrating human expertise, next-generation AI capabilities, and a centralized data ecosystem. The evolution of these elements could position the intelligence profession to shift from its current stance to one that is focused on preemptively shaping adversarial

pathways. The goal is to harness and apply information so effectively that it disrupts adversaries' strategies and maintains a systematic advantage.

Phase 1: Laying the Foundation

In this initial phase, AI is employed to optimize processes, automate repetitive tasks, and improve data accuracy. Cloud computing platforms provide the necessary infrastructure for scalable data storage and real-time processing. AI and machine learning (AI/ML) handle data processing and generating insights from large datasets. Data management platforms provide searchable and accessible data, while cybersecurity measures protect data integrity and system security as AI systems are integrated into intelligence activities. Human roles shift from manual data collection and processing to overseeing AI systems, verifying their outputs, and incorporating findings into strategic

decisions. This transition requires intelligence officers to develop new technical skills, including the ability to engage with AI systems effectively, communicate insights generated by AI, and understand the underlying processes.

Officers need to be proficient in managing AI tools and interpreting complex outputs, but they also need to cultivate skills in judgment, ethics, and reasoning. Understanding the ethical implications of AI-generated recommendations and applying human judgment to validate and contextualize these insights are crucial. This phase sets the stage for more advanced AI applications by equipping officers with the foundational knowledge and skills necessary for effective human–AI collaboration.

Phase 2: Transitioning AI from a tool to an active collaborator, advancing Human-AI Teaming.
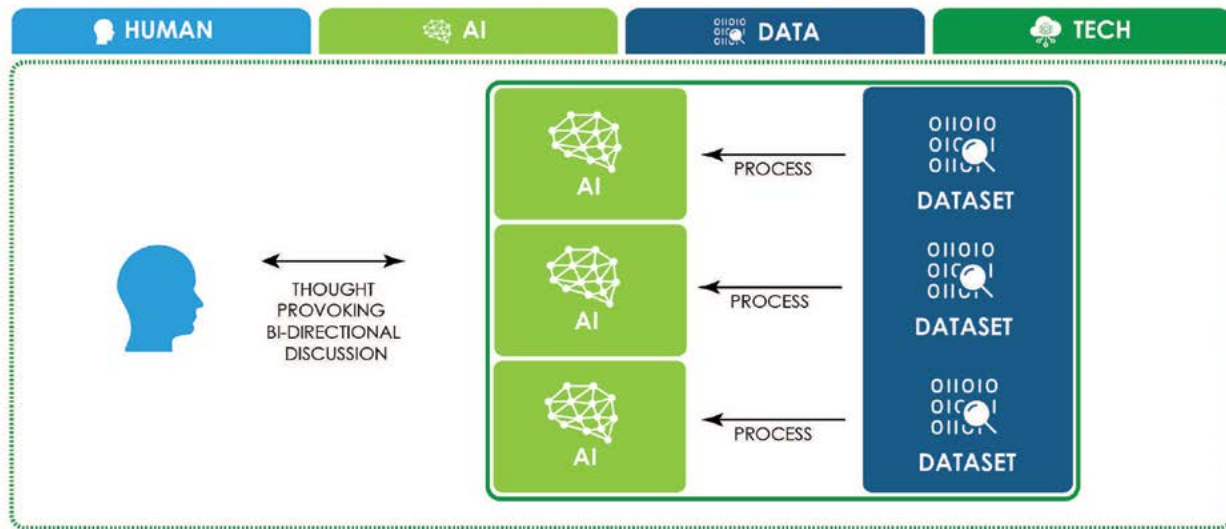
Phase 2: Collaboration

In Phase 2, AI transitions from a tool to an active collaborator. Multi-modal AI models and reinforcement learning agents provide insights from diverse data sources, and adapt to changing conditions. Enhanced data integration enables AI to consolidate information from multiple sources and synthesize new data to fill gaps, facilitating decisionmaking that aligns with mission priorities. Advanced digital identity solutions along with next-generation communication technologies support secure, real-time collaboration and data sharing, which are essential for effective human-AI interactions. Integrating datasets provides a more complete, accurate, and consistent view of data, reduces fragmentation and redundancy, enables efficient analysis, facilitates data sharing, and improves decisionmaking by providing broader access to high-quality data.

As AI systems become more capable, human roles expand to include advanced data interpretation, scenario planning, and collaborative problem-solving. Officers are trained to engage actively with AI, guiding hypothesis development and refining analytical focus based on strategic priorities. This phase requires significant up-skilling in data science, machine learning, and advanced analytics, but also in communication and ethical decisionmaking. Officers must learn to ask the right questions, critically evaluate AI-generated outputs, and effectively communicate the nuanced insights to stakeholders. Additionally, they need to develop a strong ethical framework to ensure that AI-driven analyses and recommendations align with organizational values and legal standards. This integration of technical, ethical, and communication skills enables a more precise intelligence picture and better supports policymakers with richer, context-aware insights.

Phase 3: Strategic Architecting

In this final phase, the partnership between humans and AI reaches a high level of integration. AI acts as a strategic partner, monitoring global events, shaping adversary actions, and developing strategies. Advanced autonomous systems ensure secure and efficient communication, essential for strategic collaboration. Unifying datasets simplifies integration, analysis, and sharing, providing a more comprehensive and accurate view of complex systems, streamlining data management, improving decisionmaking, and enhancing collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Phase 3: Partnering between humans and AI reaches a high level of integration.
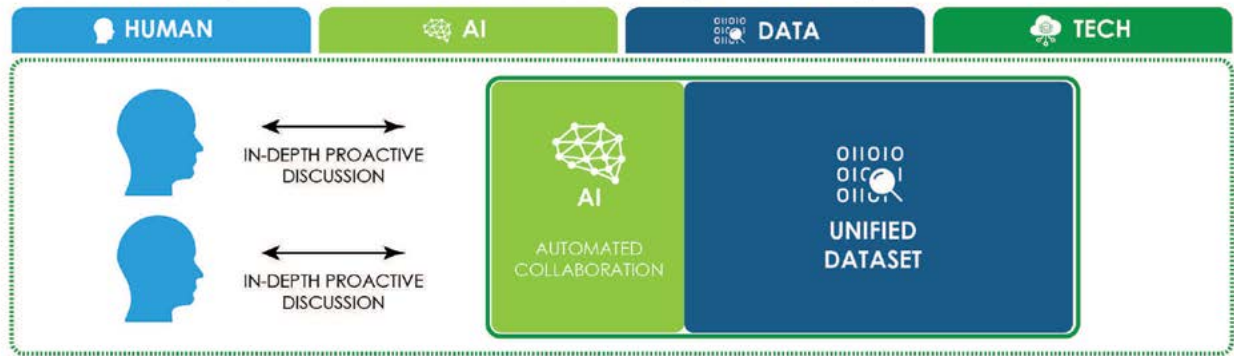
Human-AI teams work as strategic planners, engaging in detailed analysis and co-creating complex influence operations. In this phase, humans transition their focus toward emphasizing oversight, upholding ethical governance, and prioritizing strategic thinking, leadership, and final decisionmaking.

Officers must develop not only technical skills but also advanced reasoning, ethical decisionmaking, and strategic communication skills. They are trained to collaborate deeply with AI, using skills in strategic modeling, influence operations, and risk assessment. This includes understanding how AI generates scenarios and predictions, evaluating the ethical implications of different strategies, and effectively conveying complex AI-driven insights to decision-makers.

AI autonomously detects and exploits opportunities to influence adversarial behavior, aligning with strategic actions. The unified data ecosystem supports Human-AI teams in shaping strategies and refining their approaches through simulations and real-time feedback. In this phase both parties use their strengths to address complex challenges and achieve strategic goals. Human experts are not only consumers of AI outputs but active participants who guide AI applications, exercise judgment, and ensure that AI-driven strategies are ethical and aligned with broader national security interests.

Policymakers benefit from this integration by gaining detailed strategic insights and the ability to influence global events with subtlety. The adaptive capabilities of Human-AI teams ensure that intelligence organizations can anticipate and respond to changing conditions, supporting long-term strategic goals aligned with national security interests. This evolution could transform intelligence capabilities at the same time enhancing human skills in strategic planning, influence operations, and AI collaboration. It prepares the workforce to engage with AI effectively, making informed decisions that are ethically sound and strategically effective in the evolving landscape of intelligence work.

The Emergent Intelligence Framework

To implement EI effectively, the EIF provides the necessary foundation. Unified, real-time data, AI-supported decisionmaking, and a coordinated HMT network, the EIF facilitates the generation of EI. Inspired by General McChrystal's "Team of Teams" approach—which prioritizes collaboration, decentralized decisionmaking, and agility—the EIF transforms intelligence operations from rigid hierarchies into interconnected, responsive systems. This enables organizations to maintain a strategic advantage by rapidly adapting to new insights and evolving challenges.

The EIF breaks down traditional silos and bottlenecks by creating interconnected workflows, allowing HMTs to share

ELF: Unifying real-time data, AI-supported decisionmaking, and a coordinated HAIT network, to facilitate the generation of EI.
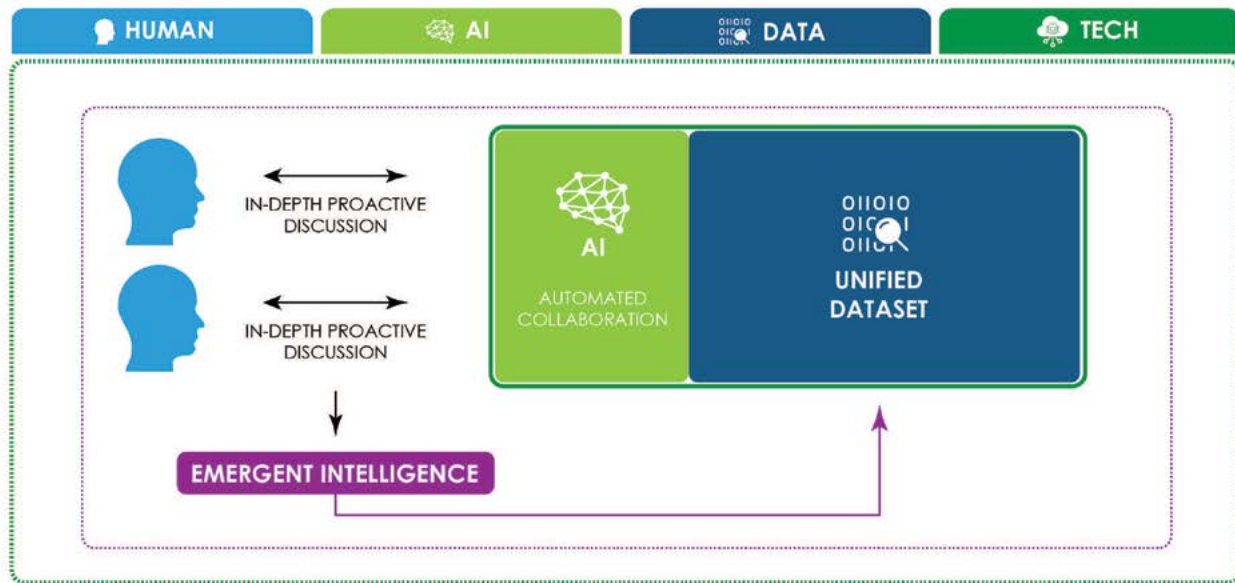
knowledge and expertise fluidly across the network, enabling real-time collaboration. This interconnected, cross-functional approach accelerates decisionmaking and improves the organization's adaptability, significantly increasing its overall effectiveness.

HMT Structure and Functionality

HMTs are designed to operate as self-directed units, empowered to make decisions at the team level while aligned with overarching mission goals. Comprising officers with diverse skill sets, HMTs collaborate effectively with AI systems, maximizing collective capabilities. A crucial formation phase involves developing a deep understanding of each member's strengths and the capabilities

of AI, fostering a collaborative environment aimed at optimizing performance.

Decentralized decisionmaking enables HMTs to act swiftly within their mission scope without needing to escalate decisions, enabling rapid responses to shifting situations. Their actions are guided by a shared strategic vision and human oversight, ensuring alignment with broader organizational objectives.

Collaboration and Communication

HMTs operate within a communication framework supported by AI-driven protocols that facilitate real-time information exchange across teams, optimizing collaboration and resource allocation. This decentralized model

forms an integrated network where human reasoning, AI capabilities, and real-time data converge to produce EI. AI systems manage information flow between teams, ensuring that insights are distributed to those who need them most.

This immediate, need-to-know communication model allows HMTs to overcome traditional organizational barriers, functioning as a cohesive network. This approach enables organizations to adapt quickly to new intelligence, providing timely, relevant, responses to policymakers and other stakeholders.

Synergy and Collective Intelligence

The core strength of the EIF lies in the synergy between HMTs, data unification, and

next-generation technologies. Each HMT operates as an independent node within a larger network, contributing unique insights and capabilities while benefiting from the collective intelligence of the entire organization. This decentralized model forms a collaborative ecosystem where human skills, AI capabilities, and unified data generate EI. Human expertise refines AI models and directs strategic focus, while advanced data integration ensures that AI accesses the most relevant information, producing more precise and actionable insights. This constructive collaboration enhances individual and organizational performance, enabling intelligence organizations and policymakers to anticipate and respond more rapidly to future challenges in a dynamic environment.

Maximizing EIF Potential

To fully realize the EIF's benefits, intelligence organizations must cultivate a culture that embraces AI as a strategic partner. This involves redefining human roles to emphasize strategic oversight and ethical judgment, allowing AI to handle complex data analysis. Building trust in AI-generated insights and integrating them into decisionmaking enhances agility and maintains a strategic edge over adversaries.

Future-Proofing Intelligence

Human-AI Teaming will provide a path to leverage advanced technologies to evolve the craft of intelligence. The output of these teams will equip organizations with unique capabilities to predict, influence, and shape global events. The roadmap to get there is through the three phases described above. By systematically adopting these phases, intelligence agencies can leverage AI-generated insights and human expertise to improve decisionmaking, streamline operations, and proactively drive strategic initiatives.

Intelligence communities now face a critical decision: adopt an approach to competition that aligns with a future state-of-the-art operating environment, or risk being outpaced by adversaries who are more adaptable and willing to deviate from legacy cultures. In the future, the competitive standard for intelligence will lie in consistently generating actionable knowledge through human-AI interactions, enabling insights that were previously unattainable. Committing to this transformation would likely enable intelligence organizations to redefine their intelligence frameworks, ensuring a sustainable strategic advantage in the evolving global digital landscape.∎

Snow Globe Multi-Player AI System

Lessons from Human-AI Teaming in War Games

Andrea Brennan, Rachel Grunspan, Daniel Hogan, Jessica D. Smith, Elizabeth VanderVeen

As the US Intelligence Community continues to adapt to emerging threats and rapid technological change, human-AI collaboration is becoming a critical enabler of mission success. To meet this need, CIA's Directorate of Digital Innovation (DDI) Futures team and In-Q-Tel (IQT) have collaborated on a research project to explore how humans and conversational AI can work together more effectively and, ideally, achieve outcomes neither could accomplish alone. This project leverages Snow Globe, a multi-player AI system built by IQT's Applied Research Team, that uses large language models (LLMs) to play open-ended war games. Through a series of jointly designed games in which human participants play alongside (or against) simulated personas, the team has demonstrated how AI war games can serve as a testbed for human-AI teaming in intelligence work.

Our first jointly designed game, held in April 2025, was guided by several research questions:

- What new techniques and tradecraft emerge when conversational AI becomes a trusted partner for intelligence officers? How can this enable a continuous cycle of discovery and insight?

- How might the integration of conversational AI into intelligence workflows transform the way officers approach complex challenges and make decisions?

- In what ways can conversational AI enhance human-machine collaboration? How can it lead to more effective and efficient mission outcomes?[a]

By pairing six human players with AI agents, each customized to simulate a predetermined temperament and disposition, the team identified several preliminary findings that confirm the potential for conversational AI to complement and enhance intelligence officers' tradecraft. In this article, we summarize those findings, explain why the IC needs a rapid and adaptable way to test human-AI teaming, and argue that AI-enabled war games offer a uniquely compelling solution.

In 2025, the rapid evolution of AI capabilities makes it tempting to assume that every AI problem has a purely technical solution. US government and business leaders, however, make this assumption at their peril because it overlooks the very real challenges and opportunities of human-AI teaming or "the collaborative interaction between humans and artificial intelligence systems to achieve a common goal."[1]

While full automation is appealing, most organizations find that the benefits will be judged by how well AI integrates with existing workflows to augment human capabilities. Successful integration, however, is about more than technology; it requires "clear communication and mutual understanding between humans and AI systems."[2]

As leaders adopt AI, they must consider the training, skill development, and expectation-management critical to its success. They also need ways to assess the return on investment for new capabilities—determining, for example, how (or whether) a model's performance gains translate across different applications. Finally, they also need effective strategies to divide work between humans and AI agents so that organizations can fully leverage the strengths of both.

There are no off-the-shelf solutions to the challenges of human–AI collaboration. Organizations are still learning how to define the roles, processes, and expectations needed to team effectively with AI. This transformation is unlike any before it, and best practices are still emerging.

Collaboration in any form is inherently organizational and messy, and human–AI collaboration won't be "solved" by a technical quick fix. That said, the IC cannot afford to wait. AI capabilities are evolving too quickly, and the pressures to deploy them are too urgent. We must experiment, learn, and adapt as this chapter unfolds.

Intelligence officers need flexible frameworks that allow them to experiment safely and iterate now, but, in high-stakes intelligence applications, the cost of failure may be too high for this type of trial and error. For these use cases, AI-enabled war games offer a valuable path forward.

Our joint IQT-DDI team has designed and run war games that simulate future intelligence workflows, allowing participants to use curated AI assistants to augment their tradecraft and decisionmaking. These games provide an unclassified, low-risk environment where officers can test new capabilities, apply them

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a. Snow Globe's architecture is described in a preprint [https://arxiv.org/abs/2404.11446v1], and the source code is publicly available on GitHub. [https://github.com/IQTLabs/snowglobe]

in different ways, and share feedback on what works best.

About Snow Globe

To support these games, IQT built Snow Globe, a proof-of-concept AI platform that uses LLMs to play open-ended war games. Its flexible, multi-player architecture is model agnostic and can be used to automate multiple aspects of war-gaming, including:

- Augmenting human players' abilities with customized AI assistants

- Simulating AI personas to serve as allies or adversaries

- Generating scenario inputs (or "injects") dynamically based on player decisions

- Evaluating game outcomes and behavioral dynamics

- Running multiple iterations of fully automated games to anticipate possible outcomes and second-order effects

War-game decisionmaking exercises that "include everything from small seminar exercises ... to large multi-day, multi-team war games"[3] are powerful tools for rehearsing real-world decision making and observing how people solve problems under simulated conditions.[45] Importantly, war games do not need to focus on armed conflict.[6] In prior work, IQT used Snow Globe to explore

scenarios involving both AI incident response and geopolitical analysis.[7] Other researchers have shown that war-gaming can also support complex decisionmaking in areas like disaster response.[89]

The value of automating war games has long been recognized.[10, 11, 12] Most prior efforts, however, have focused on quantitative games, where players are limited to predefined sets of actions. By leveraging LLMs, Snow Globe enables the automation of open-ended, qualitative games, where players are free to take a wide range of creative actions.

Snow Globe can respond to any move a player makes and can dynamically introduce unexpected scenario injects based on game-play. The ability to generate qualitatively novel responses is Snow Globe's central innovation.

Real life rarely follows predefined rules, which is why open-ended war games can more accurately reflect real-world complexities. These games offer unique value as tools for training, planning, and decision-support. By introducing AI into the design, game-play, adjudication, and analysis of open-ended war games, Snow Globe creates new opportunities to explore (and test) human-AI collaboration. We have observed Snow Globe contributing meaningfully to human players' problem-solving discussions and participants have reported that AI

integration significantly enriched their overall experience.

Snow Globe also allows us to simulate a wide range of AI personas. In geopolitical games, we have experimented with generic characters as well as personas modeled after historical foreign leaders. In these cases, we generated Snow Globe personas based on publicly available information about historical figures' political leanings, leadership style, and decision-making preferences sourced from sites such as Wikipedia. Across multiple experiments, we found that the inclusion of personas can significantly shape the trajectory of game-play.

We have tested several types of AI assistant personas. Some are designed to reflect specific temperaments and dispositions; others aim to adapt to an individual's preferred learning style. Still others are grounded in curated document sets and guidance, enabling them to provide domain specific expertise such as legal reasoning or a particular intelligence tradecraft. It is worth noting that the goal of this research is not to replicate the expertise of human specialists, but rather to explore the potential of AI to augment and support human intelligence officers' capabilities.

What We've Learned

In April 2025, we conducted our first jointly designed, AI-enabled

war game; it was held at IQT with six human participants. During the game, participants collaborated with both their AI assistants and one another to develop a strategic response to a geopolitical scenario. Below, we summarize key findings from the game and the work leading up to it. Prior to the April war game, a preliminary "play-test" helped us refine Snow Globe's AI assistant personas and determine which LLM to use.

Align Capabilities with Participants' Expectations

The preliminary play-test was conducted at IQT using an on-premise version of Snow Globe, powered by a local instance of the open-source Mistral 7B model. Several participants attempted to use their assistants to retrieve information not only about the fictional world of the game, but also about real-world events and current data. Although we did not expect the Mistral 7B model (relatively small by LLM standards, with a 2022 knowledge cutoff) to behave like a search engine, many participants appeared to expect exactly that. When their AI assistants failed to meet those expectations, some participants become frustrated, which colored their view of Snow Globe and the game-play experience.

We suspect that prior use of ChatGPT likely shaped participants' expectations about how all

AI tools should behave. The rapid evolution of consumer-facing models—especially free, highly capable tools like ChatGPT—continues to raise the bar for what users expect from enterprise AI systems.

To help align expectations in the April game, we took two steps. First, we provided a Snow Globe user guide with clear instructions and sample prompts. Second, we ran Snow Globe using the much larger GPT-4o model, which offered significantly better performance on information-retrieval tasks compared to the smaller Mistral 7B model.

Show the Possibilities

Initially, we envisioned personalized Snow Globe personas for each participant, that would respond to participants' preferences along with data about what helped them perform best. In advance of the preliminary play-test, we surveyed participants about what they (thought they) wanted in an AI assistant but, given that we were preparing for our first game, we had little performance data to incorporate.

During the preliminary play-test, we were surprised by how similarly our "personalized" personas behaved. Many factors probably contributed to this—we saw opportunities to refine both our survey instrument and our

implementation of personas—but we also wondered how would participants know what they wanted from Snow Globe, before they saw what the tool could offer them?

With new capabilities, users may not know what they want until they see what is possible. Even then, building the features people want is not always the best way to address their underlying needs. Recognizing this, we changed our strategy for War Game 1 and offered participants a curated a set of personas that showcased a range of behaviors and dispositions. We intend to revisit the idea of personalization once our participants have more experience with Snow Globe and we have more data on game outcomes.

Conversational AI Could Enhance Intelligence Officers' Workflows

During War Game 1, Snow Globe's AI assistants provided facts, analysis, and suggestions that blended the fictional scenario elements with real-world context, offering detailed outputs that enriched the game-play experience. On our post-game survey, participants gave the experience an average rating of 4.25 out of 5. All respondents agreed that their AI assistant "seemed accurate," meaning that it provided outputs containing reliable information.

Although the six human participants brought varying levels of AI experience, all made frequent use of their AI assistants and were generally receptive to the recommendations they received.[a] Overall, feedback was strongly positive. Three-quarters of participants said their AI assistants helped them, or their team achieve their goals during the game. We observed occasional issues with truncated responses, but in general, response lengths varied appropriately with the prompt, from a single line to outputs exceeding 1,000 words.

Participants used their AI assistants for six different tasks during the game:

- Getting oriented to the scenario

- Retrieving fact-based information

- Requesting explanations or clarifications about key concepts, actors, and events

- Comparing multiple courses of action to support decisionmaking

- Organizing, structuring, and sequencing information

- Composing and refining recommendations and written outputs

As expected, participants' use of AI shifted over time, indicating potential to tailor assistant behavior to different stages of the analytical workflow. Half of survey participants reported that their AI assistant was able to handle ambiguous prompts. The remaining participants were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with that assessment. When asked whether their AI assistant suggested a course of action they had not previously considered, three-quarters of participants said yes.

Personas are not "One Size Fits All"; Neither are LLMs

Brevity Matters

Although we did not ask participants about this directly, their behavior suggested that long, overly detailed responses were often viewed negatively. LLMs can produce lengthy outputs with ease, but human bandwidth hasn't grown to match, nor has our appetite for reading repetitive or bloated content. In some cases, long AI responses overwhelmed or discouraged users, even when the content was valuable. Prompting can do a lot to improve clarity and conciseness, but not all war game participants have the experience to shape model output effectively. To bridge this gap, we recommend providing sample prompts that help users generate shorter, more readable responses from their AI assistants.

Personas

Before game-play began, participants selected AI assistants from a curated set of personas:

- Pacifist: Prefers the least aggressive course of action

- Aggressor: Prefers the most aggressive course of action

- Tactician: Focuses on immediate problems and short-term outcomes

- Strategist: Focuses on broad challenges and long-term outcomes

- Detail Oriented: Provides specific, detailed plans

- Big Picture: Emphasizes overarching goals and priorities

All six personas were used during the game and, as expected,

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a. Notably, we observed differences in how players who had more hands-on experience with AI used their assistants. For example, during War Game 1, one participant had significantly more prompt engineering experience than the other players. Our analysis of chat logs showed that the more experienced participant demonstrated greater variation in prompt type, greater emphasis on refining AI-generated output, and was the only participant who explicitly asked the AI assistant to share its sources and show its reasoning. We view this as an indication of how improving officers' digital acumen will probably change the way they use AI tools.

different personas responded in distinctive ways.

In some cases, players prompted their AI assistants in ways that aligned with each AI persona's disposition by, for example, asking the Aggressor for military options. (It responded with a detailed list of aggressive military strategies.) However, we also observed cases where the AI assistant's behavior reflected its persona even without direct prompting. In one instance, the Tactician persona was asked about Ukraine. It addressed both short-term and long-term considerations but ultimately focused the player's attention on Ukraine's immediate role, consistent with its tactical orientation.

We see considerable value in giving participants the ability to choose the kind of advice and assistance they receive from AI. That said, we have also observed ways in which the use of a particular LLM might shape what choices are available. For example, in testing we observed that responses generated with Mistral 7B frequently leaned toward diplomatic negotiation, even when behavior was inconsistent with the assigned persona. While this could be mitigated through prompt engineering,

a larger model we tested (GPT-3.5) exhibited this issue to a lesser degree. One advantage of using a relatively small LLM like Mistral 7B is that it can run locally with light hardware. However, we have found that larger models often capture persona nuances with greater fidelity.

While model selection plays a role in persona design, embedding written persona descriptions directly into prompts provides significantly more control. We are exploring how to further improve persona performance by equipping agentic assistants with tools like document retrieval.

One common criticism of LLMs is their proclivity to hallucinate, generating responses that sound plausible, but are inaccurate. Although this behavior is problematic in many applications, in war-gaming, it is actually a benefit. For AI to participate in war games effectively, it must be able to blend facts with the fictional world of the game. For example, our geopolitical scenario for War Game 1 involved countries with fictionalized names. With only a minimal amount of background context about these fictional nations, Snow Globe was able to generate plausible

responses detailing their involvement in complex geopolitical dynamics.

Additionally, to adjudicate open-ended games, AI must be able to generate outcomes that no one planned for but that still make sense within the game's logic. The kind of grounded creativity required to introduce new events and evaluate their consequences is, essentially hallucination with purpose.

Next Steps

As we refine the Snow Globe platform and expand our library of AI personas, upcoming war games will explore more complex geopolitical scenarios and multi-domain crises to stress-test human-AI teaming under layered, dynamic conditions. We also plan to integrate curated, declassified datasets and synthetic intelligence data streams to create richer, more realistic operational environments that mirror the complexities of intelligence work. Our next war game will build on these efforts, and we invite collaboration from across the national security enterprise to help shape the next generation of human-AI collaboration.

About the authors: Andrea Brennan is senior vice president and deputy director of IQT Labs. Rachel Grunspan is the former director of Digital Futures in CIA's Directorate of Digital Innovation. Daniel Hogan is a senior data scientist in IQT Labs. Jessica D. Smith is a digital intelligence strategist in DDI Futures. Elizabeth VanderVeen is an AI strategist in DDI Futures. ∎

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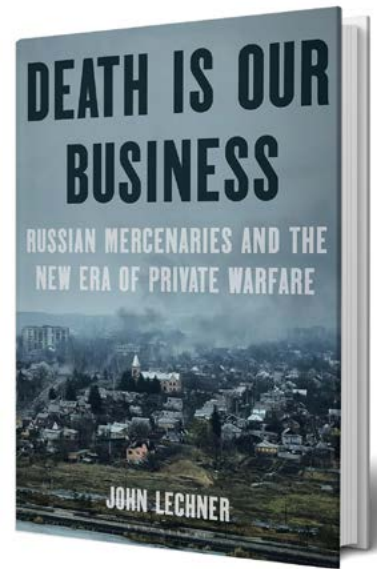
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review essay

The Russian Way of War
Death is Our Business: Russian Mercenaries and the New Era of Private Warfare

Reviewed by Yong Lee

Author:	*John Lechner*
Published By:	Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025
Print Pages:	288
Reviewer:	Yong Lee is a senior fellow, Asia Program, at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Since 9/11, the phrase "civilian military contractor" has become familiar to defense analysts and writers. Military contractors took on valuable security roles in Afghanistan and Iraq, protecting VIPs, installations, and lines of communication, often taking similar risks as soldiers on the battlefield. In most cases, military contractors were former soldiers who continued their calling. The expansion of civilian security roles made military contractors a permanent fixture in war zones, and purveyors of these contractors became known as private military companies (PMCs).

Within the past 10 years, Russia's Wagner PMC has become the most well-known military contractor in the world, fighting in Africa, Syria, and Ukraine. We do not know the history of Wagner's record in battle, but the popular perception is that its soldiers regularly outperformed the Russian Army. This is understandable, considering the Russian military is a conscript force, while Wagner soldiers are veterans with prior military service. This began to change in 2022 when Wagner started recruiting Russian prisoners to form penal battalions after the invasion of Ukraine.

American freelance journalist John Lechner, in his first major book, chronicles the rise and fall of Wagner PMC. *Death is Our Business* in its essence is a biography of one man, Yvgeny Prigozhin, his rise to prominence, and the company he founded less than 10 years before his death. Prigozhin was born in St. Petersburg in 1961, when the city was still known as Leningrad. What people remember about Prigozhin is his distinct look, with a shaved head and a natural scowl, and his humble and troubled beginning. According to Lechner, "in his youth, Prigozhin spent nine years in prison for robbery and fraud. After his release, he claimed he sold hot dogs until he had enough money and connections to enter the restaurant business." (8)

Whether Prigozhin was a hot dog vendor or not is not certain. What we do know is that by 1997 he owned a popular restaurant in St. Petersburg and one of his clients

was the city's mayor, Vladimir Putin. Thus started Prigozhin's unlikely rise to power, as "Putin's chef." As Putin climbed his way up the Russian hierarchy, so did Prigozhin. Taking advantage of his home town ties with the most powerful man in the country, Prigozhin expanded his role from a restaurateur to a government contractor, providing meals to Russia's school children and the military. Prigozhin's food empire did not stop there. He also catered state dinners and served President Bush twice during state visits in 2002 and 2006. (38)

Prigozhin's rise was steady but it wasn't until 2014, following Russia's occupation of Donbas and Crimea, that he not only fed Russia's Army but started providing the government with soldiers-for-hire as well. (20) Climbing up the social ladder in Putin's circle meant displaying loyalty, personally to Putin and to Mother Russia. Lechner notes that "the war in Donbas was yet another chance to showcase one's patriotism" and to improve his status with the Boss. (56) To do this, Prigozhin, a man of Jewish descent, teamed up with a Russian neo-Nazi with an SS tattoo on his neck, a former special forces soldier named Dimitry Utkin. "Wagner" was Utkin's radio call sign in the field, an homage to the German composer known for his anti-Semitism and for being a favorite among Nazis. (56) We do not know if Prigozhin had any personal qualms about Utkin, but he had something Prigozhin needed: fighting men in the field and military experience. For Prigozhin, military contracting meant diversifying his holdings and providing Putin a service the government needed, experienced soldiers in eastern Ukraine.

An ex-felon with no prior connections to business elites or officials before Putin started frequenting his restaurant, Prigozhin was not embraced among the president's courtiers. Although he became a wealthy man, Russia's nouveau riche looked down on him as a former prisoner and a butler at state dinners. Taking advantage of Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in 2014, Prigozhin reinvented himself as a military leader. While Utkin led the military operation, Prigozhin became Wagner's public face. It's a role he apparently relished. The entire world knew him, with the Western media regularly touting Wagner as Russia's most effective fighting

force. No one could ignore him now. According to Lechner, eventually the international fame that accompanied Wagner "whipped his ego into ever more dangerous proportions and he started losing his ability to calculate risk effectively." (209)

Wagner marched the globe with Russia's muscular foreign policy in the 2010s. It guarded Russia's friends and interests in the Middle East and Africa and faced off against the US military in Syria. Yet there was no amount of loyalty and martial prowess Wagner could display that could fulfill Prigozhin's need for acceptance and recognition. Indeed, Prigozhin had to face the indignity of Russia's entrenched elites forming their own PMCs and competing against him for contracts, muscling him out of a market that he pioneered. Even the Russian gas giant Gazprom got into the PMC business. (207) For Prigozhin, his fate as a perpetual outsider was too much to bear.

No one will know for certain why, in June 2023, Prigozhin decided to march toward Moscow in rebellion, trying to settle a personal score with Russia's defense minister, Sergei Shoigu. Lechner presents two possible motives. One, Prigozhin believed that the Ministry of Defense (MOD) had withheld support from Wagner during the group's brutal fight against Ukrainian defenders in the battle for Bakhmut. Second, he wanted to prevent moves by MOD to take operational control of Wagner forces. Military contractors following orders from the government that hired them seems logical, but that is not how Prigozhin saw it. He saw it as a personal insult, yet another example of elites trying to take away something he had built. Prigozhin probably thought he could do a better job leading the MOD then Shoigu, and, overestimating his own self-importance, began publicly airing his grievances against the defense minister.

This turn in 2023 probably sealed Prigozhin's fate, months before he marched toward Moscow. Publicly calling out Putin's defense minister, after years of MOD largess, was not going to help Prigozhin move up the political ladder or maintain his status. Biting the hand that fed him may have been the final act, lashing out against the loss of future contracts and return to ignominy.

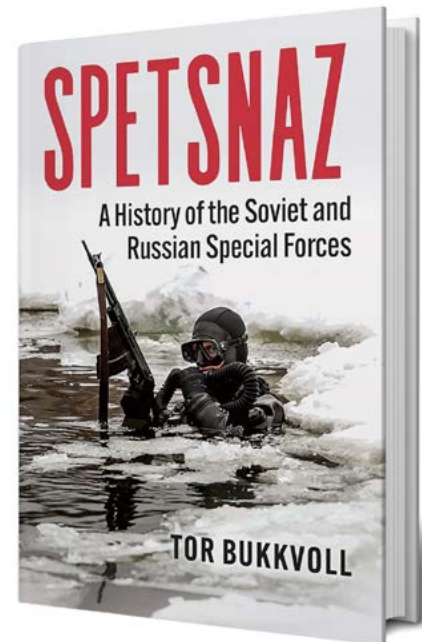# Spetsnaz: A History of the Soviet and Russian Special Forces

Reviewed by Yong Lee

Author:	*Tor Bukkvoll*
Published By:	University Press of Kansas, 2025
Print Pages	306
Reviewer:	Yong Lee is a senior fellow, Asia Program,at the Foreign Policy Research Institute.

Utkin, when he first recruited and organized veterans of the Russian military to fight as contractors, sought out men with backgrounds similar to his own—former members of the Russian special forces. Spetsnaz, a Russian phrase that means "special purpose," has become a synonym for the Russian special forces. Tor Bukkvoll, a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment who focuses on European security issues, turns his attention to the history of Russia's special forces in his latest book *Spetsnaz*.

The Soviet military intelligence directorate, commonly known as the GRU, was behind the creation of the first special-purpose unit. Spetsnaz's founding and its original mission were tied to the early history of the Cold War, when the United States first began deploying tactical nuclear weapons to Europe. "It was the need to destroy these nukes early in case of war that triggered the Soviet Union to create special operations forces." (41) According to Bukkvoll, the new units trained to "[insert] personnel deep into the enemy territory [and] find any American 'Little John' free-flight nuclear rocket artillery launchers." They were to find the launchers within 36 hours and, once found, destroy them within 90 minutes. By the 1980s, this directive to seek and destroy covered the US Pershing medium-range missiles in Europe as well. (34)

The first generation of spetsnaz came from the Red Army Airborne troops. Spetsnaz recruiters would show up at airborne units and demand the transfer of its best soldiers to a new outfit. An incredulous airborne commander would call his headquarters, ready to throw the haughty recruiter out of the office, only to find himself reluctantly transferring his best soldiers to this new unit. As Bukkvoll notes, "giving up their top performers to some low-ranking officers without a word as to what they would be used for was a serious insult." (33) Unlike special forces in the West, volunteering was not the first step into this select community in the Red Army. Many spetsnaz soldiers were conscripts who were selected and transferred based on their skills, whether they liked it or not. The existence of the unit was shrouded in secrecy. While the United States suspected the Red Army was building a special warfare forcee, this was not confirmed until the 1960s.

As the US war in Vietnam was heating up, an increasing number of protests in the States roiled the domestic political landscape. "When Yuri Andropov was promoted to chair of the KGB in 1967, his number-one priority was to regenerate a specific capacity for 'special actions of a political nature'." (83) Soon Spetsnaz GRU found itself with a civilian counterpart, Spetsnaz KGB, whose mission was to organize partisans and direct political activities behind enemy lines. Spetsnaz KGB helped train allies

in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, as the Soviets attempted to fan the flames of revolutionary fervor around the world, modeled after North Vietnam and its successful insurgency against South Vietnam.

Spetsnaz GRU trained for war time sabotage in Europe, and Spetsnaz KGB helped train and lead third world revolutionaries, but as a special-mission force "Spetsnaz did not engage in direct combat until [the] invasion of Afghanistan in 1979." (53) The first to enter the war were 520 Muslim Spetsnaz GRU soldiers from central Soviet republics, famously known as the "Muslim battalion" or the "Musbat." (107) GRU authorities specifically made the ethnically based troop deployment decision, assuming Muslim soldiers would better acclimate and blend into Afghanistan. The Musbatys were brought into Afghanistan to assist the pro-Soviet government. Their first mission was to protect President Hafizullah Amin and his palace. However, when Moscow learned that Amin was responsible for the death of long-time Soviet ally Nur Muhammad Taraki, the general secretary of the Democratic Party of Afghanistan, their orders changed from protectors to assassins. (109–11).

Killing Amin was the beginning of the Red Army's long slide into its own quagmire for much of the 1980s. First brought into Afghanistan with an assumption of cultural familiarity, the Musbatys instead became known for their brutality against Afghan civilians. While spetsnaz provided a convenient direct-action arm for the Soviet leadership, it was of little use in a war with no strategic direction. Excessive secrecy and stove-piping within the Red Army further prevented the effective employment of spetsnaz. Complaining about the lack of battlefield intelligence, Red Army commanders had no idea that they had in theater the best strategic reconnaissance soldiers in the Soviet military and did not know how to use them. These commanders saw and treated spetsnaz as highly trained light infantry and assigned them missions they would assign to conventional airborne forces.

The misuse of spetsnaz during war has never been corrected, suggesting that this is a deeper cultural problem within the military high command and the national command authority in Moscow. Besides the famous Alpha Group of the Spetsnaz FSB, charged with the national counterterrorism mission, deploying spetsnaz as light infantry has been a generational complaint since Afghanistan. This complaint has surfaced again and again in all of Russia's wars after the collapse of the Soviet Union—Chechnya, Georgia, and now Ukraine. When going to war with conscripts who are poorly treated and trained, it is no surprise that commanders in the field would repeatedly rely on a select group of professional soldiers, whether they are better employed as strategic assets or not.

Bukkvoll's latest work is not a comprehensive military history of spetsnaz nor does it claim to be. The author in the preface acknowledges the methodological shortcomings of the book, as it is based mostly on published memoirs and interviews with former members. Readers understand Bukkvoll's research limitations, however. Historians rely on access to archives for documentary research based on original sources. Such state archives probably do exist but, needless to say, under the current Russian government they would be off limits to a defense researcher from a NATO country. This is a research challenge that Lechner faced as well. Wagner PMC and its founders are politically sensitive topics in Russia. Lechner traveled the world, visiting the places where Wagner operated, in Mali, Syria, and Ukraine, and based his book mostly on interviews with former members.

Despite any methodological shortcomings, Lechner and Bukkvoll provide a wonderful service to the reading public interested in Russian military history. The two books together provide a valuable snapshot of the Soviet and Russian special forces and military contractors. When read together, the books offer a deeper understanding of how these communities evolved and grew from one another and what a former spetsnaz operator like Dimitry Utkin, who fought in every Russian conflict since the end of the Cold War, witnessed as a soldier and then as a private military contractor. ∎

review essay

Razvedchik, *Russia's Intelligence Journal*
Reviewed by Mel Miller

Published By:	SVR, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service
Print Pages	Approximately 115 pages per edition
Reviewer:	The reviewer is a Russian linguist and author of *Discovering Hidden Gems in Foreign Languages* (Springer Nature, 2023).

In December 2022, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (best known by its Russian initials SVR) published its first quarterly issue of the journal *Razvedchik*. Several months into Russia's "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine, the journal provided a platform for the SVR to tell happy stories of intelligence successes past and present. This was more important than ever, considering their war wasn't going as planned. Since then, in the 11 issues available, *Razvedchik* offers a Russia-centric version of *Studies in Intelligence* that will be as interesting as it is frustrating to those used to reading quality espionage literature.

Each issue is around 115 pages in length, with a high production quality that is pleasing to the eye. Even the name of the journal, which comes from the Russian word for intelligence officer, probably resonates among those already in the game. The alternative, *shpion*, is considered a derogatory term because it is used primarily for those labeled as traitors. This journal is not for these types, but rather it is for professionals and stewards of the profession.

Just as *Studies* is openly affiliated with CIA and the US Intelligence Community, *Razvedchik* has direct ties to veterans of the KGB and SVR. In May 2025, *The Insider* (a Russian investigative journal) prepared its own expose of *Razvedchik*: it was not impressed. According to *Insider* sources, editor-in-chief Mikhail Pogudin is a retired KGB general with little experience in field work. Technically, the journal was founded by Soglasiye, a charitable foundation for the promotion of social protection of the SVR officers and veterans. Pogudin is the head of this organi-

zation, and as *The Insider* observed, Soglasiye shares an address with the SVR's press bureau.

Besides their shared address, a cursory review of the content is all it takes to see the SVR's active hand in the content and objectives. A warm picture of SVR Director Sergey Naryshkin accompanies the introductory remarks of the first issue. It is clear from these remarks that the journal was born out of a desire to combat supposed misinformation about Russia's activities, thereby honoring the legacy and sacrifices of those who served. This journal offers Russia's version of the truth.

What might that be? In the first issue, Pogudin clarified that the journal's purpose is to allow veteran intelligence officers to discuss the serious and existential threats posed to Russia by the political, financial, and economic world order (December 2022, 10). These themes are at the forefront of each issue, but with an intelligence twist. While the Russian view of the truth is obviously skewed in ways that present the Russian cause as righteous and just, there is something to be said about some of the unique content that *Studies* could never provide. For this reason, readers of *Studies* cannot afford to ignore *Razvedchik*.

Main Enemy

Readers who remember the Cold War will be relieved to know that the United States is still the "Main Enemy": even 35 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russians have not moved on. America is to blame: always has been, always will be (December 2022, 5).

Razvedchik takes continual stabs at America's global stature in a way that might be comical to the US readers. *Razvedchik* offers a unique lens into Russia's own insecurities by offering a platform for ideas that *Studies* could never capture. For example, Vyacheslav Molotov's grandson, Vyacheslav Nikonov,[a] reveals Russian views of US global standing by complaining that the Washington underestimates Russia, just as Napoleon and Hitler underestimated Russia in their

eras (March 2025, 29). When Russians read about the history of the World War II, they see the status that the United States gained, but the Soviet Union did not. They feel as though they deserve an international status commensurate with the high losses they incurred. Their invasion of Ukraine appears to be a way of recreating the years immediately after World War II; this time, they hope to emerge as a global power and rebalance the world order in their favor. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov verifies this assessment by asserting that the United States is attempting to revive an outdated unipolar world centered around itself (March 2023, 3).

Ukraine

The first issue of *Razvedchik* was published just 10 months after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, suggesting that the journal's goals may include defense of the war effort, which is a common theme throughout. The journal takes a whole-of-propaganda approach to justifying Russia's actions in Ukraine by blending historical and current references, each one more ridiculous than the next.

The reader is left with the impression Russia has decades of reasons to invade Ukraine today. From interviews with former intelligence officers who fought there decades prior, to reviews of declassified documents, the journal paves a clear path to explain their most recent "special military operation." Across the issues, various authors paint Ukrainians as fascists and terrorists. One article detailed how Ukrainians formed terrorist groups in the 1930s to advocate for the creation of an independent Ukrainian state. To achieve their goals, the group partnered with German fascists; subsequently, the Germans redirected the Ukrainians to conduct anti-Soviet activities (December 2022, 82). Readers may not agree with this pretext for war nearly 100 years later, but Russia-watchers cannot afford to ignore that this is the reality Russia wants its intelligence officers to embrace.

The early days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine were rife with propaganda and other evidence of journal-

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a. Nikonov is a career politician and academic. He currently serves as the dean of the Faculty of Public Management at Moscow State University, and he has served in various roles for the Russian State Duma since 1993. Molotov was a Soviet politician and diplomat and was second in command to Stalin during the 1930s. He died in 1986.

istic confusion. The first issue of *Razvedchik* weaves a story about Poland's alleged plans to occupy Western Ukraine in spring 2022 (December 2022, 22). Today's chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Crimea, Vladimir Konstantinov, writes in favor of the return of Crimea to Russia in 2014 (March 2024, 44). Ironically, just two years before, he strongly condemned it.[a] Propaganda works on some people.

It all makes sense when one realizes that Russia still views Ukraine through its Soviet lens. For example, *Razvedchik* accused "Ukrainian authorities of deliberately pursuing a policy of denigrating the Soviet past … by abandoning the memory of the heroic deeds of their ancestors, but also the Russian identity" (March 2023, 93). Readers of *Razvedchik* may be led to believe that this is what Ukrainians want, and the Russians are simply there to give it to them.

The outcome is already known: "The result must be our unconditional victory. Otherwise, we will not justify all the sacrifices that we have made and continue to make, and the sacrifices are great…. The enemy will be defeated" (March 2025, 33). We'll just have to wait and see.

Russian Economy

If themes in *Razvedchik* are indicative of Russia's priorities, then the Kremlin must really be concerned about Russia's finances. Nearly every issue makes some reference to the weakness of the US dollar and Russia's challenge to US world dominance via the economy. Not all of it is propaganda, though.

The power of Western financial markets and their ability to inflict economic pressure on Russia have interesting and creative conversations about measures Russia can take to counteract their leverage. Articles

on this topic seem to contradict each other at times. One article lauded the Russian government for implementing creative solutions to import substitutions and implementing a responsible fiscal policy that favors Russian economic development (December 2022, 29–30). Other articles indicate a more dire situation requiring more drastic measures: for example, the development of a new BRICS currency to counteract the dollar (March 2024, 46). In doing so, they may strive to offset what they view as discrepancies in the balance of world power.

Illegals

Another theme throughout the journal is the legacy of Russia's jewels of espionage: their illegals. Interestingly, the journal portrays even some of their worst failures as successes.[b] Well-known illegals such as Dmitriy Bystroletov and Pavel Sudoplatov are painted as heroes, but little attention is paid to their untimely apprehensions.[c, d] The Russians continue to find ways to honor them: in 2022, a documentary film about Bystroletov won an SVR Prize for Literature and Art. According to the description, the film contained newly declassified information. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, busts of Sudoplatov were unveiled in Melitopol and Donetsk (March 2023, 94). It is telling that the journal chose to highlight these illegals of Ukrainian descent.

While *Studies* offers book reviews of the newest intelligence-themed publications, *Razvedchik* takes it one step further by offering reviews of intelligence-themed art, sculpture, live performances, and television shows. The SVR established the Prize in Literature and Art in 2000, and it now uses *Razvedchik* to showcase the winners. Among these is a sculptor recognized for the creation of a monument to illegal intelligence officers that now sits on the SVR

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a. "Pro-Russian Activist Falls On Hard Times In Annexed Crimea," Radio Free Europe (January 16, 2016). http://www.rferl.org/content/pro-russian-activist-crimea-hard-times/27483975.html.

b. Illegals are a type of intelligence officer who lives abroad for an extended period of time, usually under a false or fraudulent identity. They are sometimes referred to as deep cover officers or scouts.

c. Born in Melitopol, Pavel Sudoplatov joined the Ukrainian State Political Directorate (OGPU) in the 1920s as a young boy. In the 1930s, he trained and worked as an illegal in several European countries, including Germany and Finland. By 1939, he was the Deputy Chief of Foreign Intelligence. He was arrested in 1953 for his association with Lavrenty Beria and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. He published an autobiography titled *Special Tasks* in 1994 and died two years later.

d. Born in Crimea, Dmitriy Bystroletov worked as an illegal all around the world and was never caught. Well known for his charisma and good looks, he is often referred to as the "Romeo Spy." It is said that he spoke over 20 languages. He was arrested in 1938 and spent 16 years in a prison camp.

campus (March 2023, 17). Readers of *Studies* may consider looking to *Razvedchik* for further sources of entertainment.

Razvedchik also interviews illegals whose identities were recently revealed in the media, offering insight into current issues. One of these included the Dultsev family, whose members were arrested in Slovenia in 2022 and traded back to Russia (December 2024, 35). Despite their arrest, they are still considered successful, raising questions about Russia's view of "success" in this sphere. Another interview, one with long-term illegal Tamara Netyksa[a] focuses on the appeal of illegal intelligence work for women (March 2023, 54), which raises questions about recruitment issues. It is apparent the SVR still greatly values illegals, but not all that glitters is gold.

Weapons

Razvedchik includes enough references to weapons to call them their own theme. The journal accuses adversaries of developing weapons to justify the development of Russia's own weapons, while reconciling historical references to developmental successes.

If ever accused of developing a harmful weapon that may be considered a violation of an international treaty, the Russians can point to the activities of their adversaries to justify their own. According to the journal, the US government is still secretly developing biological weapons at Walter Reed Medical Center (March 2023, 36). The journal insinuates that suspicious outbreaks of diseases in Africa, Asia, and Latin America just so happened to be caused by the same pathogens the Russians accuse the US government of possessing. It paints the US government as a monster with an international death wish: "The Pentagon's obvious goal for the future is to develop such modified microorganisms against which there will be neither diagnostic facilities nor treatment." (39)

Those who read often about Russian history know how much they love to talk about the atomic bomb, and *Razvedchik* is no stranger to this topic. They tell their version of events by highlighting scientific developments from the Soviet side, as well as the history of the creation of the Kurchatov Institute. Illegals also played a role in atomic espionage, and the journal is sure to highlight these accomplishments, too (March 2023, 42–46). Fear was, and still is, a large part of Russia's calculus.

Circle of Friends

What authors for *Studies* would probably call "strategic partnerships," *Razvedchik* refers to as Moscow's "Circle of Friends." In this recurring theme, the journal highlights that Russia still has many allies in a world that is increasingly out to get it. Not all is doom-and-gloom for Russia's intelligence services. The journal features headlines about the ways Russia's intelligence partners with their closest allies. For example, the heads of intelligence organizations of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were reported to have come together for a productive conference in December 2022 (March 2023, 96).

Much attention is paid to Africa throughout the issues. It is apparent that Russia's own interests in Africa are rooted in its desire to combat the neocolonialism imposed by Europe and the United States. Just as they see the war in Ukraine, the Russians view themselves as liberators of others from Western (and therefore, non-Russian) ideas (June 2025, 3). Not only is Africa the land of future opportunity, it is also "significantly ahead of Western countries in terms of security for Russian businesses" (June 2023, 16). Despite Russia's purported friendly view of Africa, *Razvedchik* could not resist the urge to highlight at least one illegal, who successfully deployed to Africa (December 2024, 59).[b]

On occasion, *Razvedchik* also honors friendly foreign intelligence services: for example, the Belar-

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a. Tamara Netyksa was recruited to serve as an illegal in 1972 and spent 22 years abroad. She learned Spanish and presumably served in Spanish-speaking countries. The SVR declassified her identity, along with the identities of six other unknown illegals, in February 2020. She was never caught.

b. Posing as a German businessman, Aleksey Mikhailovich Kozlov served as an illegal in South Africa in the late 1970's. His mission was to report on South Africa's nuclear weapons program. He was arrested in July 1980 and awarded the title 'Hero of Russia' in 2000.

Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni shown shaking hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg, July 27–28, 2023 (*Razvedchik* 11, No. 2, 2025).

usian KGB and SVR work together to combat the subversive activities of Western countries. The SVR even hosts Belarusian KGB officers at its Foreign Intelligence Academy (December 2022, 40). Another article honored the head of the Kazakh intelligence service (KNB) by telling the history of its formation. Pogudin wrote a poem honoring the Russia-Kazakh partnership.

Arts and Culture

In many ways, *Razvedchik* serves a similar intent to *Studies* in promulgating Russia's patriotic and historical views on a variety of topics relating to intelligence and national security. Yet *Razvedchik* contains certain content that *Studies* generally eschews: art, fictional stories, games, and patriotic poetry by former intelligence officers contrast with the serious and academic approach that readers of *Studies* have grown to appreciate.

One example is the "psychological workshop" in every issue that covers methods intelligence officers can use to cope with stress (December 2022, 48),

resolve conflict (March 2023, 50), and interpret nonverbal language (June 2023, 44). Essentially, these are the soft skills young and aspiring 'razvedchiks' are expected to embody.

Another noteworthy feature of the journal is its access to key figures in Russian espionage, To date, *Razvedchik* has interviewed the notorious spy George Blake (December 2022, 58), sculptor Andrey Kovalchuk (who created memorial plaques of notorious intelligence officers) (December 2022, 35), and even CEO of Rostec (a key supporter in the war in Ukraine) Sergey Chemezov (June 2025, 30). The journal also grants readers access to the Moscow flat previously occupied by the notorious illegals Morris and Lona Cohen: perfectly preserved, it serves as a window into the lives of intelligence officers the Russians still consider great, even so many decades later. There are also espionage-themed crossword puzzles, and most issues end with some sort of homage to the bravery of intelligence officers past through the telling of heartfelt espionage-themed poetry.

Razvedchik, Russia's Intelligence Journal

US intelligence officers cannot afford to ignore *Razvedchik*. For every Western intelligence officer not reading *Razvedchik*, there are current or future Russian intelligence officers (or their allies) getting inspiration from it. Readers steeped in Russian and Soviet history will get more out of reading *Razvedchik* than those who are not, but regardless, the journal offers a frame of reference for Russian decisionmaking past, present, and future. *Razvedchik* is available in Russian and English on the SVR website. ∎

intelligence in public media

The Illegals
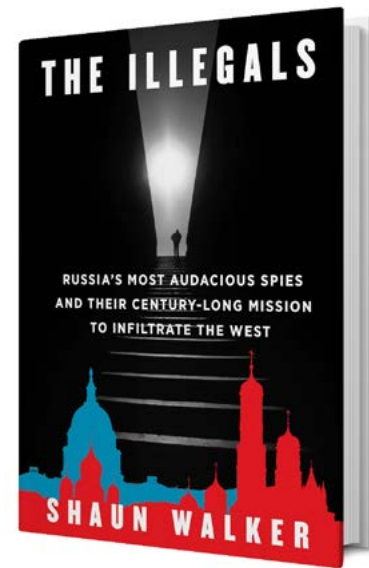*Russia's Most Audacious Spies and Their Century-Long Mission to Infiltrate the West*

Reviewed by Kathy G.

Author:	*Shaun Walker*
Published By:	Knopf, 2025
Print Pages	448 pages
Reviewer:	The reviewer is a CIA officer who also served at FBI and NSA.

In 2018, US viewers of the TV show *The Americans* were treated to the final agonizing decisions of Elizabeth and Philip Jennings, KGB illegals operating with relative dramatic impunity in the United States at the end of the Cold War. The fraught series finale saw the Jennings' children left behind in the United States while their parents fled back to Russia to avoid arrest for espionage by the FBI. For daughter Paige, the communist cause so deeply felt by her mother, was seemingly passed down to the child who voluntarily remained in the enemy territory of the United States to carry on her parents' work. The emotional turmoil of these moments demonstrated, albeit fictionally, the quite real and immense psychological pressures faced by these highly trained Soviet illegals.

Illegals in this context are trained intelligence officers who give up their Russian identities, families, and culture to live undercover overseas, while fulfilling espionage taskings from their KGB handlers.[a] Illegals are venerated as the best-of-the-best of Russian spies, honored in movies, TV, postage stamps, and most importantly by Vladimir Putin himself who has routinely extolled the virtues and hardships of the illegals. The types of pressures associated with creating and living an entirely new life away from home and family with very human consequences, even in the cold game of intelligence brinkmanship between East and West. The same sense of humanity found in *The Americans* also wonderfully underpins Shaun Walker's *The Illegals*, which encompasses over 100 years of KGB and SVR illegals history by telling their dramatic

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a. While other Soviet Bloc countries possessed illegals programs, they all contained a Soviet core. Programs in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland all appeared to dissolve with the fall of the Soviet Union. Today only Russia and Cuba appear to have such programs that are publicly known.

and sometimes humdrum stories, often through the lens of their memoirs or interviews with Illegals and their trainers themselves.[a]

> *"Only an intelligence service that works for a great cause can ask for such a sacrifice from its officers." KGB spy and former MI6 officer George Blake describing the psychological burden of being a Russian KGB illegal officer*

> *"I know pretty much how everything is. No real achievements in work that I [am] supposed to do…." Text from Russian SVR Illegal Artem Shmyrev (alias Gerhard Daniel Campos Wittich) to his SVR Illegal ex-wife Irina, summer 2021 (from texts published by the* New York Times, *May 21, 2025)*

Walker, a British journalist and long-time Russia watcher, has worked for *The Independent* and, more recently *The Guardian*. His deeply researched book, *The Long Hangover: Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past* (2018), discussed Russia's unresolved struggle to come to terms with its Stalinist legacy. Much like *The Long Hangover*, *The Illegals* focuses on the human factors of Russia's most elite spies, while describing the rich and fraught mythos surrounding this niche Russian intelligence program. Walker further takes on important questions surrounding the actual utility and cost effectiveness of such an intelligence platform that invests so much but provides minimal returns in the present day. The SVR illegals program has faced heavy losses twice in recent decades, both in 2010 with the now famous "Ghost Stories" arrests of 10 SVR illegals in the United States and the global arrests of SVR and GRU illegals during 2022–23 after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Walker begins his illegals history with the genesis of these operations during the nascent days of subversive intelligence activity in the early 1900s by jumping into the life of Vladimir Lenin. Early in the revolutionary period Lenin took on many aliases worldwide in attempts to avoid scrutiny from both foreign security services and domestic (the Okrana), as the communist cause grew. In fact, the name Lenin was an alias for Vladimir Ulyanov. Using gripping details from Soviet files and personal histories, Walker convincingly describes how these early intelligence operations shaped Lenin's thinking about the "legal" work to be conducted as revolutionaries against the tsar, such as propaganda and organization, and then the "illegal" work of espionage and assassination necessary to avoid detection.

For Lenin, legal and illegal work should be conducted separately, only coming together through operational management at the Center (Moscow). Nevertheless, it was the combination of these two activities that would make the Bolsheviks successful. This latter illegal work was foundational to what we know today as Russian intelligence. Long before the Soviet Union was diplomatically recognized, and could therefore post intelligence officers abroad posing as diplomats, Lenin was developing operatives with false documentation who could slip across countless borders. This runs counter to the development of Western intelligence services who institutionalized their efforts using diplomatically covered officers but only later developed non-official cover for intelligence collection. The role of illegals at the tip of the spear of Soviet intelligence therefore explains their dominance and continued place in Russian intelligence structure, according to Walker.

The second half of Walker's book gently shifts the narrative from the successes of the multilingual, passionate ideologue illegals of the early and mid-20th century to the promising but perhaps less successful young officers of the 1960s to present. Walker's focus on KGB Illegal Yuri Linov, who worked in Ireland, Israel, Britain, and Belgium takes the reader through the course of an illegal's career and the hard-to-fathom psychological aspects of living this type of life. Walker also covers multiple but perhaps less dynamic illegals operating through 2022, including information from more current SVR illegals cases exposed publicly in the last three years. This fascinating evolution, or perhaps devolution, of the illegals program during and after the Cold War is artfully put into perspective through

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a. Walker also drew heavily on the famous Vasili Mitrokhin archive for this book. In addition to the two volumes Mitrokhin co-wrote himself, see Gordon Corera, *The Spy in the Archive: How One Man Tried to Kill the KGB*, reviewed in *Studies in Intelligence* by Ian B. Ericson (Vol. 69, No. 3 [September 2025]).

Walker's description of the changing motivations of the illegals and their Moscow-based officers. Illegals once motivated by ideology were now less compelled by duty but for survival and driven more by ego. This may likely explain the seeming lack of success in recent decades compared to the 1930s through the 1950s.

Throughout the book, Walker also plumbs the depths of selecting and training illegals, seemingly only altered over minutely decades. Walker explains that illegals, then (and allegedly now), were trained by the KGB and SVR by spending years studying in secret *konskvatira* (safehouses) in Moscow. Illegals—selected from universities and military then go through intense instruction consisting of one-on-one foreign language practice, Morse code, source-elicitation practice, and other forms of subterfuge and tradecraft (*konspiratsiva*). Only after years of training and potential arranged marriages to other trained officers, would the illegals themselves begin foreign deployments using fake documents of one country to infiltrate into a third country for intelligence operations. These operations were and are almost always focused eventually against the West, even if their deployment locations are far away from the likes of Washington, London, or Brussels.

Illustrative of the variety of the illegals' intelligence functions, Walker provides further details about Naum Eitingon, whose recruitment of Caridad and Ramon Mercader—a daring mother-and-son duo who allowed Soviet intelligence to penetrate Leon Trotsky's inner circle and assassinate Trotsky in Mexico. In this vein, Walker explains that illegals were trained not only to collect foreign intelligence against the West, but also to play a proactive role in monitoring refugee and infiltrate dissident groups. More traditionally, illegals also served to collect on the intentions of foreign governments and economies. Illegals achieved tremendous success in the 1930s and 1940s in recruiting foreign diplomats and collecting intelligence on world on the brink of war.

Unfortunately, many of these officers were recalled back to Russia, only to be met with imprisonment or death under Stalin's purges. Their crime? Delivering information that leadership did not want to hear. Perhaps the best example of an illegal who met this fate is Richard Sorge, a Russian military intelligence (GRU) illegal who according to Walker was "probably the best-placed Soviet spy anywhere in the world." Sorge learned that Germany was planning Operation Barbarossa, an invasion plan that would violate the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Sorge's unpopular intelligence collection led to cutting Sorge's expense budget. Interestingly, Walker does not go much further in discussing the Sorge case, including the latter's eventual recall to Moscow and execution.

Walker's omission about Sorge's fate highlights the only flaw in Walker's otherwise well-researched and compelling study of KGB and SVR illegals—the lack of any substantive discussion of the GRU's illegals program. The GRU itself is only mentioned a few scant times in *The Illegals*. Given Walker's thesis that his work discusses illegals comprehensively, the omission is difficult to understand, although all too commonplace among Soviet and Russian intelligence historians who focused strictly on the SVR or the FSB. The absence of commentary about the GRU's illegals program, which has also existed for 100 years, seems even more of a puzzle given the uptick in open-source information regarding the exposure of GRU cyber, HUMINT, and illegals operations in recent years.[a] Interestingly, during an interview at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in June 2025, Walker was asked about the greatest current risk posed by illegals. Walker's response cited not an SVR example but the story of a GRU illegal, Olga Kolobova (alias Maria Adela Kuhfeldt Rivera), who had been in place near a NATO base in Italy until 2018, when she returned to Russia after the attempted assassination of Sergey Skripal and his daughter Yulia in England.[b]

Telling these compelling stories of KGB and later SVR Directorate S (Illegals Support) illegals and

a. Another historical GRU illegal is Leopold Trepper, who ran a large agent network in Europe in the 1930s known as the Red Orchestra. See a review by John Ehrman of Trepper's autobiography, *The Great Game,* in the "Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf" in this issue. Trepper is only mentioned in passing in Walker's book (96).
b. Skripal, a former GRU colonel and MI6 penetration, had been arrested by the FSB in December 2004 and eventually convicted. He was released in mid-2010 as part of a spy swap in the wake of Operation Ghost Stories and was resettled in Salisbury, England.

their work in both Western and Eastern Europe leaves open questions as to why the resource-intensive endeavor still exists, especially in a world of biometrics which facilitates false document detection and more economical forms of espionage. Here Walker discusses the rise of what he assesses are off shoots of the more long-term traditional illegal, such as "fighting," "fly away," and "virtual" illegals. Although on the surface Walker would seem to be conflating other types of Russian intelligences officers with the core illegals cadre—when one considers the more philosophical definition of Lenin's illegal work, these new types of activity do pass muster as potential illegals-like activity using his tradecraft concept of Russian *konspiratsiva.*

June 27, 2025, marked the 15th anniversary of the arrest of 10 SVR illegals in the United States. The multi-year joint CIA-FBI investigation yielded mountains of information about SVR tradecraft and how unproductive the illegals program appeared to be. In the eyes of many, this would have been a natural place for the SVR to potentially end this costly and relatively unsuccessful program. Like many Russian military and intelligence stratagems, the illegals program relies on churning out as many of these types of operatives as it can (although Walker points out there are probably not as many illegals deployed as we might think). For the KGB and now the SVR, the hope remains that perhaps they only need one Illegal to be successful for the entire program to be lauded.

This is also why the US government needs to remain vigilant, according to Walker's sources. Regardless of the ultimate foreign policy victories such officers actually provide to Putin, he himself remains highly invested in propagating the myth of the illegals. He opened a new memorial at SVR headquarters for intelligence officers in 2020 featuring a nameless illegal couple. In 2024, Putin also presented the Russian Order of Courage to Artem Dultsev and Anna Dultseva, an SVR illegals couple swapped (in addition to two GRU illegals Pavel Rubtsov and Mikhail Mikushin) during the historic US-Russia prisoner exchange on August 1, 2024, that also returned multiple wrongfully detained US citizens.[a] With public acknowledgments such as these, we have certainly not seen the last of the illegals program. ∎

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a. For insights into the SVR's and the Russian Government's perspective on intelligence, see Mel Miller's review of the SVR's publicly available *Razvedchik* journal elsewhere in this edition. *Razvedchik* often features profiles of illegals.

intelligence in public media

The Party's Interests Come First
The Life of Xi Zhongxun, Father of Xi Jinping

Reviewed by Dr. Emily Matson

Author:	Joseph Torigian
Published By:	Stanford University Press, 2025
Print Pages	704 pages; illustrations, notes, bibliography, index
Reviewer:	The reviewer is an adjunct professor of modern Chinese history at Georgetown University.

The ways in which we craft historical narratives are often influenced by contemporary concerns, and how we understand the life of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) revolutionary Xi Zhongxun is no exception. In his comprehensive account of Xi's life, political scientist Joseph Torigian cautions readers from the outset that this "is itself a story about the politically explosive nature of competing versions of the past." (5) During Xi's own life, party history was already highly politicized. As Xi Zhongxun's son, Xi Jinping, has become indisputably the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong, both Xi Jinping's "detractors" and "boosters" have also sought to "weaponize" Xi Zhongxun's life and legacy for their own sociopolitical motives. (6)

Any potential biography of Xi Zhongxun, then, must be approached with great care and painstaking attention to historical detail, and Torigian does just that. Drawing on extensive primary and secondary sources in Chinese and Russian, Torigian's *The Party's Interests Come First* is an impressively nuanced portrait of a deeply complex individual whose devotion to the party, as the title indicates, remained unshaken. Torigian makes clear that "Although this book has both caves and a pipe, it is not intended to be a Freudian analysis of Xi Jinping." (7) However, knowledge about the father's life and legacy can still inform our perspective on what practical and ideological motivations drive the son today. It is also worth noting that this is not a book for newcomers to Chinese history but rather assumes readers will at least some prior knowledge of 20th century China.

Torigian's magnum opus begins with Xi Zhongxun's early life in Shaanxi Province and ends with his death

on May 24, 2002. However, this biography is not strictly chronological but often spends several chapters discussing different aspects of the same time period. For instance, Chapter 10 is on Xi's work in foreign affairs in the 1950s, particularly with the Soviet Union during the fraught lead-up to China's 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement and the Sino-Soviet Split that followed. Chapter 11 then details Xi's contributions to ethnic and religious policy in the 1950s, notably in Xinjiang and Tibet, and Chapter 12 zooms in on Xi's family life in Beijing during this period (His son Jinping was born in 1953). Separating chapters thematically proved to be an effective way of ensuring proper emphasis on the variety of themes that informed Xi's life.

Although this work is ostensibly about Xi, it is also about the triumphs and tragedies of 20th century Chinese history and the intense intraparty factionalism and policy disputes that characterized every step. In 1935, for instance, Xi and his mentor, Liu Zhidan, were among the victims of an inner-party purge in northern Shaanxi.[a] Although CCP history as well as Xi himself later claimed that it was only the arrival of Mao Zedong and the Long Marchers that "saved" Xi, Torigian claims the historical reality was "a little more complicated: Xi's death was not imminent, Mao's own role is overstated, and it took years for Xi to achieve complete rehabilitation." (41)

In narrating Xi's life, Torigian also contributes new angles to our understanding of major tragedies in Communist China such as the Great Leap Forward (1958–62). Still sensitive to the potential implications of the purge of fellow Northwestern cadre Gao Gang on his own career, Xi was careful to follow the Party line in light of both the 1957–58 Rectification Campaign and the August 1958 Beidaihe meeting that signaled the beginning of the Great Leap Forward. In the summer of 1958, for instance, Xi "roundly condemned anyone who cared more about themselves than about the party" and also claimed that a "Communist consciousness" was more important than knowledge, thus showcasing his anti-intellectual tendencies as well. (193–94) However, Torigian shows that although Xi continued to be publicly supportive

of Great Leap policies, he was skeptical behind the scenes. There was often tension between Xi's individual conscience and what he perceived as his duty to the CCP collective. For instance, when Xi visited Gansu Province in 1958, he was greatly concerned by the construction of the Yintao Dam near Lanzhou in a region that did not even have electricity or much industrial capacity. In public, however, he praised the project, saying that "Gansu has let us see the future of Communism." After the project failed and exacerbated the mass starvation in Gansu, local officials "complained that Xi knew about the endeavor, and even visited it, but did not discover any problems at the time." (196) In light of the persecutory nature of the subsequent Lushan Conference, however, Torigian argues that "criticizing the Leap would have been difficult for Xi, if not unthinkable" at that time. (201)

Although historians of modern China usually see Wu Han's 1965 play *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* as the "opening salvo" of the Cultural Revolution, Torigian argues that the purge of Xi after the 1962 publication of a biographical novel of his mentor, Liu Zhidan, was an earlier foreshadowing of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. He agrees with Chinese historian Han Gang that "the criticisms of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* were an "extension" of the *Liu Zhidan* case." (218) Xi had been supportive of novel's author, the wife of Liu Zhidan's younger brother. However, he had warned her that "writing such a large novel is not a game" and that the work could potentially cause problems given the fraught history of intraparty conflict in the Northwest. (209) Later, Yan Hongyan and other political enemies of the then-deceased Gao Gang would claim that *Liu Zhidan* was actually an attempt to promote Gao. After Yan contacted the notorious Kang Sheng, Kang "accused Xi of trying to use the novel to reverse the verdict on Gao Gang." (211) However, Torigian argues that Deng Xiaoping also deserves a large portion of the blame for what happened to Xi. Li Jiantong was pressured into claiming that "most of the material she used [in the book] had been drawn from Xi's life." (2121)

At this point, Xi was doomed to fall, and Torigian subsequently details the extraordinary trials and

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a. Liu had been imprisoned before Mao's arrival and was then freed, but he would be killed in battle not long after in 1936.

tribulations he underwent. First, Xi had to conduct "a yearslong process of writing constant self-criticisms about his past." (219) In 1965, he was moved to a factory in Luoyang, Henan Province. Although Xi was initially "enthralled" with the Cultural Revolution (221), he would end up suffering greatly at the hands of the Red Guards. Xi was kidnapped by a faction of Red Guards in Xi'an on January 7, 1967, and subject to painful struggle sessions in which he lost hearing in his right ear and was forced into holding the "jet-plane" position for two hours. (223) Xi also received incredibly poor treatment in "Number 73," a prison in the Shaanxi Military Region. In the summer of 1967 alone, Xi was subject to over 10 large struggle sessions and 10 smaller ones. (226) Torigian shows that during the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Enlai did not step in to save his former comrade. Indeed, throughout *The Party's Interest Comes First,* Torigian shows a more draconian side of Zhou (and Deng Xiaoping, for that matter) than the public is accustomed to observing.

After the Cultural Revolution and Xi's rehabilitation, Xi was sent to Guangzhou to become the second secretary of the party committee in Guangdong Province. Xi proved committed in his attempts to restorie intraparty democracy. However, Xi was by no means eternally patient—he had a poor temper and was often "very long-winded," but no one dared interrupt him at meetings. (258) Additionally, although Xi was open to converting unbelievers to the CCP through persuasion and dialogue, the Cultural Revolution had convinced him of the "need for stability and unity" and to avoid chaos at all costs, but when necessary "he did not shrink from more repressive methods." (267) While Xi was in Guangzhou, he also had an undeniable impact on the "Reform and Opening Up" movement. He observed the migration of many Chinese from Guangzhou to Hong Kong and Macau, and decided one potential method to solving this crisis was to make Guangzhou into a special economic zone, open to the outside world. Xi was supported in his proposal by the then-chairman of the CCP Hua Guofeng, and Torigian emphasizes that although Deng approved as well, "Deng's role should not be overstated." (278)

Xi's more flexible ethnic and religious policies are another highlight of the book. Torigian charts the relationships between Xi and ethnic minority leaders, notably the Panchen Lama, the Dalai Lama, and the ethnic Mongolian party leader Ulanhu, spanning multiple decades of shifting ethnic policies. After 1945 when Xi became head of the Northwest Bureau, Torigian shows that while Xi could resort to force, he was also sensitive to "the usefulness of other methods of control: gradual co-optation of local leaders and effective propaganda" in dealing with the ethnic groups under his jurisdiction. (109) One particularly poignant incident was Xi's visit to the Panchen Lama on December 14, 1951 at Kumbum Monastery. When Xi visited Genghis Khan's tomb nearby, he bowed three times, explaining that "the Mongol was a 'national hero, extraordinary, and great.'" The next day, Xi showed extreme deference to the Panchen Lama, referring to him as *foye*, meaning "Buddha." Both these incidents were shocking to other party cadres present, but Xi shrugged them off as being consistent with the party's ethnic policy. (120-21) After the purges of the late 1950s and the disastrous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, Xi once again played a big part in pursuing more moderate relations between the Party and ethnic minority groups in the 1980s. Although he did "betray culturally essentialist views" in certain rhetoric, Torigian shows that most significantly, Xi argued in 1986 that "the party should never again use campaign-style purges to attack people who hold different opinions." (400)

Torigian details Xi's later years largely through the lens of the Tiananmen Square protests and subsequent massacre on June 4, 1989. Although Xi once again understood the power of persuasion, "his other solutions, the study of party history and the spirit of sacrifice, were rooted in the past." (503) We do not know for sure whether Xi acted and, if so, how, during the spring of 1989; other party elders with "reformist" credentials, such as Lu Dingyi, did not end up supporting the protestors. Ultimately, Xi backed the party, but Torigian argues that "[his] behavior is less a case of cowardice than a demonstration of political judgment." (505) Xi was certainly in a vulnerable political position after the purge of Hu Yaobang several years earlier. However, Torigian does ultimately pass judgment on Xi's inaction, arguing that "Xi did miss an opportunity to go down in history, like Zhao Ziyang,

as a man of principle who refused to go along with the decision for martial law." (505)

Ultimately, I believe Xi's commitment to the ideals of the CCP above all else did actually make him a man of great principle, although he was also a man with flaws. "In this book," as Torigian warns us at the very outset, "the traditional 'heroes' of Chinese history come out a bit worse, and the 'villains' a bit better." (20) One of Xi's most laudable character traits throughout his life is that despite the injustices committed against him, he never wavered in his loyalty and commitment to the CCP and the revolution: "although the party betrayed Xi Zhongxun, Xi Zhongxun never betrayed the party." (20) Why would Xi continue to have faith in a party that had lost faith in him? Torigian does not comment too extensively on this other than to argue that this was ultimately a very meaningful life to Xi, "a life that afforded him the excitement of participating in the grand adventure of revolution in an organization that he believed was a manifestation of the iron laws of history," (20) and a life that deeply influenced the overall trajectory of Xi Jinping.

Torigian ends his account of Xi Zhongxun's life by focusing on the importance of the father's legacy for the son's leadership. Xi Jinping, Torigian argues, "has not fully resolved the problems at the heart of the Leninist system, and he might have created new ones that remain poorly understood." (542) The Leninist system is indeed full of tensions and contradictions, which are inevitable according to the theory of Marxist dialectics. However, I paused after reading the final sentence of *The Party's Interests Come First*. In conclusion, Torigian argues that "left out of this narrative [of Xi Jinping's version of party history] is a full account of the terrible costliness in human suffering that has come along with the revolutionary project—a Faustian bargain seen so clearly in the life of the man Xi Zhongxun."

There has certainly been abundant human suffering in the Chinese revolutionary project. However, this is only one side of the coin—we must also consider the tremendous "wins" for the average Chinese citizen over the past 76 years—for example, overall gains in longevity, and education—both in the 1950s and in the years following the Cultural Revolution, during which millions of Chinese were lifted out of poverty. I would also hesitate to call Xi Zhongxun's life a "Faustian bargain" with the party. In the 16th century German legend of Dr. Faust, the doctor gives up his soul to the devil in exchange for 24 years of limitless power and pleasure. CCP policies can and should undoubtedly be critiqued for their excesses. However, Xi's principled, religious-like faith in party ideals should not be dismissed. Of course, power corrupts, and the communist ideal is in essence an unattainable utopia. However, there are also clear historical and ideological reasons why Chinese intellectuals and peasants alike were so attracted to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. In part, Marxism promised to make sense of a chaotic, messy history and bring dignity and livelihood to China's suffering masses (whether it did is, of course, up for debate). Xi did not sell his soul for material comfort, knowledge, or prestige—in *The Party's Interests Come First*, Torigian arguably shows the exact opposite. For the sake of his "soul" (or the material equivalent in the atheistic communist ideology), Xi was willing to sacrifice everything, including his personal desires.∎
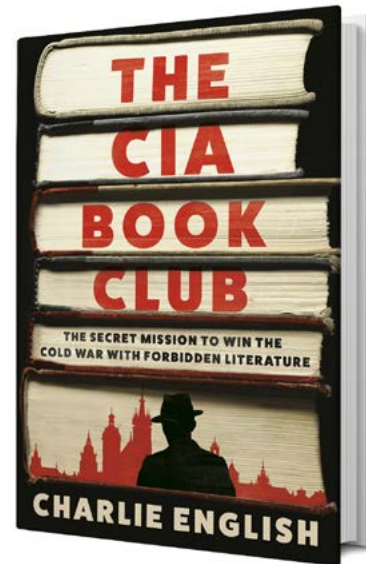
intelligence in public media

The CIA Book Club
The Secret Mission to Win the Cold War with Forbidden Literature

Reviewed by Dr. David Robarge

CIA's secret program to send books to Soviet Bloc countries during the Cold War was one of the longest-running covert action operations in its history. Lasting from July 1956 to September 1991, the Book Program was responsible for delivering as many as 10 million volumes of dissident and Western literature to readers behind the Iron Curtain. The program started somewhat ineffectually, with early, stumbling efforts to distribute leaflets and letters denigrating communism and touting Western achievements by balloon and scattershot mailings as well as reliance on a mélange of fractious émigré groups for propaganda written in the West. It became more sophisticated over time, working through specialized CIA front companies and established commercial publishing houses in the United States and Europe to print certain works or, more often, to supply and distribute copies of existing books that Soviet Bloc governments did not want their citizens to read.

Charlie English, formerly a literary editor at the *Guardian*, has crafted a well-written chronicle of the Book Program and its impact principally in one country—Poland. But that creates the book's main shortcoming: a disjointed and uneven narrative that focuses largely on the antiregime movement in Poland that developed into the Solidarity trade union movement and brought down the regime starting in 1989. Members of that resistance were important in clandestinely distributing Book Program materials into their country, often in ingenious ways, but much of what they did—which English details (often very dramatically) based largely on interviews with former underground members—was conducted under the auspices of CIA's covert action campaign or independently from it and not under the Book Program itself. The two operations were complementary but distinct, and English's sometimes gripping accounts of the resistance's furtive activities and the Polish government's often brutal repression frequently overwhelms the story-telling. The Book Program fades into the background or vanishes entirely for long stretches.

When English concentrates on "the CIA's Book Club," he does a creditable job of describing the important personalities and mechanisms by which so much literature

got distributed to so many eager readers in the Soviet Bloc. US policymakers had pressed CIA to conduct influence activities similar to the Book Program since the agency was created in 1947, but not until Josef Stalin's death in 1953 were restrictions on intellectual life in Iron Curtain countries relaxed sufficiently for such operations to have any effect. To take optimal advantage of those changes and avoid prompting retaliatory repression, the Book Program's managers insisted from the start that it be an instrument of peaceful change and not a catalyst for political uprisings.

CIA's effort to publish Boris Pasternak's *Dr. Zhivago* began a series of relationships with publishers and distributors in the United States and Europe that included cooperative non-émigré and émigré companies but also involved creation of new proprietaries to help ensure control over content.[a] Distribution channels included bookstores and book fairs, youth festivals, conferences, international sports competitions, special mailings to UN delegates, donations to overseas libraries, educational institutions, clubs, cultural associations, and churches, and smugglers' networks. Person-to-person distribution through travelers, mariners, and long-haul truckers was always a key clandestine part of the program to elude postal censorship, especially for overtly political books. Some of those methods were especially important in Poland for bringing in CIA-supplied equipment and supplies that the underground used to disseminate its messages—another example of the complementarity of the two covert operations.

As the Book Program grew, it caused Soviet Bloc authorities to devote more postal, customs, and security resources to censoring mail, monitoring cross-border movements, and surveilling anti-regime elements. Beyond forcing those additional (and ultimately wasteful) diversions of money and manpower, the interception or discovery of even a small amount of banned or controlled Western, émigré, or dissident literature left communist officials with the disturbing

thought that they had only found the surface of a much deeper reservoir of subversive sentiment—hence the "shark fin" and "iceberg" metaphors sometimes used during these kinds of operations.

English clearly tries to indicate that, along with the courage, daring, and resilience of the Polish resistance, the Book Program had a significant impact in destabilizing the regime. Better open-source assessments of the operation, however, come from people who were personally involved with it, such as John Matthews and Alfred Reisch—especially Reisch, who has written the most comprehensive study of the Book Program.[b] In addition to citing the number of books distributed over the years, they make a compelling case with data on thousands of responses to mailings and requests for additional titles and with written testimonials from recipients of the books. Other data of the program's resonance are the increasing frequency with which distributed books were reviewed or cited in other works and communist regimes' extensive efforts to interdict book shipments

The democratization of Poland after the parliamentary elections in 1989 was the first step in the demise of the Soviet empire, but even before then, Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* (relaxation of intellectual and cultural controls) was mooting the underlying premise of the Book Program. Covert distribution of "non-conformist" literature soon became unnecessary, and after the Soviet Union was disestablished in 1991, President George H.W. Bush canceled the Finding authorizing the publication and infiltration of literature into the Soviet Bloc. English quickly describes the denouement of the Book Program, but his preoccupation with events in Poland, many of them not directly connected to "CIA's Book Club," limits the value of his examination of one of CIA's most underrecognized achievements. The Book Program still awaits a chronicle that combines English's personalized storytelling with Reisch's thorough academic-style research.■

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a. Detailed in Peter Finn and Petra Couvée, *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle Over a Forbidden Book* (Pantheon Books, 2014).
b. John P.C. Matthews, "The West's Secret Marshall Plan for the Mind," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 16, no. 3, 409–27; Alfred A. Reisch, *Hot Books in the Cold War: The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program Behind the Iron Curtain* (Central European Press, 2013).

intelligence in public media

The Dictators' Club
How Regional Organizations Sustain Authoritarian Rule

Reviewed by Tony Sutton

Author:	*Maria J. Debre*
Published By:	Oxford University Press, 2025
Print Pages	218 pages
Reviewer:	The reviewer is a CIA analyst.

Autocratic regimes can limit their risk of democratization by joining together in regional organizations, argues Maria Debre in her new book, *The Dictators' Club: How Regional Organizations Sustain Authoritarian Rule*. Her careful and valuable contribution makes for a specialist's read, advancing an analyst's understanding of regime survival strategies and of international organizations. Going explanations for autocracies' longevity focus primarily on internal factors, often structural. A minority of explanations look outward, considering the disposition of great powers and the effects of geopolitical patrons or aid donors. The role of regional organizations was less well charted before this first effort from Debre, a scholar of international relations at Zeppelin University in Germany.

The book's strength is original quantitative analysis correlating regime survival with membership in regional organizations. Debre borrowed, combined, and extended several extant references to construct a project-specific dataset characterizing 72 multinational regional organizations that pursued political, economic, or security mandates between 1945 and 2020. A subset of those regional organizations qualified as dictators' clubs whose member countries averaged low scores on a democracy index.

Debre analyzed the survival patterns of 119 autocratic regimes that were ever members in these regional organizations, applying a bevy of controls and robustness checks. Autocratic regimes were less likely to be replaced by democracies if other members of their regional organizations were more deeply autocratic. Regimes were just as likely to be replaced by another autocracy, however, regardless of the degree of autocracy among fellow members in regional organizations.

Case studies illustrate possible mechanisms by which dictators' clubs protect autocratic members, but here the evidence shifts from conclusive to exploratory. One hypothesized mechanism is that regional organizations redistribute resources that autocratic members can use to fund patronage, repression, or social spending. The Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, provided money

and ultimately security forces to put down protests in Bahrain in 2011.

A second way autocracies protect each other within regional organizations is by vetoing attempts to hold members to democratic standards. Spoiler roles are particularly important in heterogeneous regional organizations like the Southern African Development Community, whose democratic members moved to criticize Zimbabwe for flawed elections in 2002 and 2008, but whose autocratic members approved only milquetoast statements.

A third protective mechanism is when regional organizations shield autocratic regimes from broader international pressures. For example, a Venezuela-led organization bankrolled Nicaragua after international donors withdrew aid during 2008–11 to punish democratic backsliding. Regional partners also blocked other organizations, like the UN, from taking action.

The case studies leave a murky theory for how regional organizations help autocracies survive. A simple challenge is that proffered explanations overlap, as when regionally supplied resources shield against international pressure. A more complex problem is that the cases suggest each explanation might only operate in the right circumstances. A regional organization's capabilities perhaps must match a regime's survival needs, which range from a reprieve from international condemnation, to lenient election observers who endorse rigged votes, to funds that tide over a poor regime, to a borrowed army that suppresses a people's movement. In many cases, it is not clear whether such help must come from a regional organization as such, or whether it would serve just as well from a single country.

If readers come away still pondering how dictators' clubs help autocracies survive, Debre has at least given them an empirical pattern to contemplate. Regional organizations with mostly autocratic members apparently create or reveal some factor that insulates autocratic regimes from democratization. This new piece of knowledge is most useful to an analyst already assembling other parts of the puzzle. By meticulously establishing a new statistical fact, the book advances its field with the sort of tantalizingly partial triumph that typifies social science.■

intelligence in public media

Defining the Mission
The Development of US Strategic Military Intelligence up to the Cold War

Reviewed by David Welker

Author	*Dr. Scott A. Moseman*
Published By:	University Press of Kansas, 2025
Print Pages	279 pages, index
Reviewer:	David Welker is CIA historian.
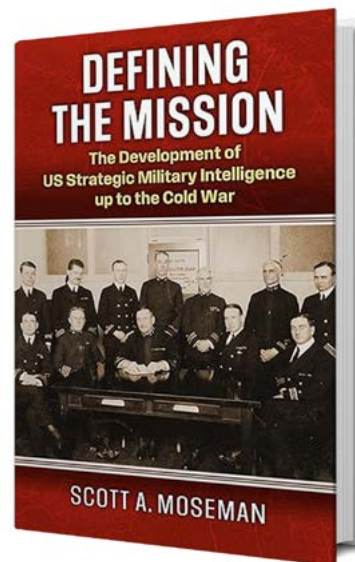
Every intelligence officer surely knows that the path to CIA's creation was paved by World War II's Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and many are familiar with the IC's early forebears like George Washington's Revolutionary War Culper Ring and the Civil War's Bureau of Military Information. By comparison, fewer of today's intelligence officers are likely to know much about US intelligence efforts in between. Fortunately, Scott Moseman's new volume nicely fills that gap.

Moseman's stated objective is to relate and explain the uncertain path of US strategic military intelligence organizations prior to the CIA's creation in 1947, which is largely a tale in which they had to "find their voice in the expanding American military and maturing of American society." As the author explains, this searching led to considerable uncertain organizational wandering that

had real world consequences on December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked unfettered by meaningful US intelligence warning. His observations about how and why US intelligence had reached this point and how it subsequently learned to become considerably more successful during the Cold War is an important lesson for intelligence officers navigating the uncertainty of their profession in today's world.

The story begins in 1882 with the creation of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), the nation's oldest extant intelligence organization, which is joined by the War Department's army-focused Military Intelligence Division (MID) in 1885. Throughout his volume the author charts the ups and down of these two primary military intelligence organizations, which for more than 60 years was all the nation possessed to provide what

then passed for strategic intelligence. Through detailed examinations of their various organizational, leadership, and budgetary changes Moseman charts the path of US intelligence from the post-Civil War era though the late 19th century, during the Spanish American War, World War I, and through World War II. In each era, Moseman relates the few successes these organizations had, but he mostly shows the how and why both ONI and MID failed to do more than marginally support the nation.

The author effectively attributes these results mostly to both policymakers' outright disinterest in intelligence and, to the extent they cared, a lingering and dated view of the topic that forced ONI and MID to "fight the last war" or reject more modern ideas that didn't align with elected officials' preferred policy directions. As a result, until World War II, US military intelligence was largely relegated to mere data collection. Within both ONI and MID, uneven senior leadership only made the situation worse, with periodic progress toward becoming effective intelligence organizations repeatedly undone by leaders looking out for their own interests. For example, ONI leaders, being navy officers, particularly knew their careers would only prosper at sea, not behind a desk in Washington, and they were seemingly always scheming to leave.

Perhaps most ruinous was that too often ONI and MID leaders hurt their own organizations by chasing what seemed to be at the time attention-grabbing missions and roles that really only diverted them from becoming capable of providing strategic intelligence. Moseman shows that both had barely begun moving toward real effectiveness—creating the first foreign

military collectors that laid the foundation for today's defense attaches and preparing early analysis for military leaders—when they eagerly shifted to become chiefly domestic spy-catchers in the anti-Hun mania of World War I.

A nice touch throughout the volume is the author's treatment of how both popular culture depicted ONI and MID in books and movies, which he demonstrates too often became a pretty trap that prevented the two organizations from evolving. As Moseman shows, such chasing the "shiny object of the day" paid near-term benefits, but at the cost of paving the path to a date with destiny at Pearl Harbor.

Knowing that in many respects this is a sorry tale that is hard for today's intelligence officers to read, even as readers know the story turns in a happier direction after World War II with the creation of CIA and the modern Intelligence Community. At the same time, Moseman's story carries important warnings as today's IC grapples with the same resource and mission pressures echoing of earlier eras.

The volume's only real weakness is that, as the author admits, it was built on his doctoral dissertation and it frequently bogs down as an organizational history, in both the good and bad sense of that term. Yet for those willing to press on, Moseman's account will serve as a valuable bit of history context that will enrich today's intelligence officers.∎

intelligence in public media

King of Kings
The Iranian Revolution: A Story of Hubris, Delusion and Catastrophic Miscalculation

Author: *Scott Anderson*
Published By: Penguin Press, 2024
Print Pages 481 pages
Reviewers: Dr. William Samii and Dr. Brent Geary
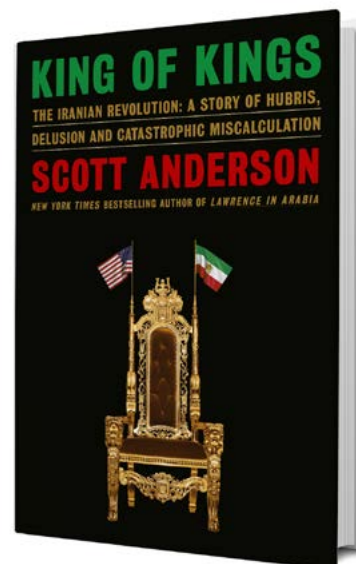
Editor's note: In this review, two longtime Iran watchers offer complementary perspectives on an important contribution to Iranian studies.

Scott Anderson has the formula for producing successful histories: writing with a journalist's engaging style, building on scholars' earlier works, and exploiting declassified government documents and other previously unavailable resources. He uses this approach for his *Kings of Kings*, a study of Iran's Islamic Revolution that doubles as an examination of United States-Iran relations. He previously used this approach for his well-regarded book on the Western role in creating the modern Middle East, *Lawrence in Arabia* (2014).

The layperson could do much worse than reading *Kings of Kings* to understand the fall of the US-allied monarchy, a development that continues to affect US regional policy and developments elsewhere, according to Anderson. (xviii) The book details a US policy failure, as the White House became dependent on Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from the late 1960s onward and policy formulation became paralyzed as the revolution loomed. The

State Department's country director for Iran decided in September 1978 that the shah's days were numbered, but at a congressional briefing two weeks later he echoed a colleague's assertion that the shah would remain in control. When he finally spoke out at a meeting with UK counterparts in October, State Department colleagues denounced him, and he recanted. (219, 234) By that time, furthermore, the Carter administration had competing priorities, senior officials advocated very different approaches to Iran, and leaks were persistent. (343)

Anderson's use of newly available resources effectively makes *King of Kings* an update to James Bill's 1988 work on Iran-United States relations, *The Eagle and the Lion*. A notable shortcoming of Anderson's book, however, is the apparent failure to use Persian-language archives or scholarship on the revolution or to interview any of the Iranian revolutionaries. This is ironic because the book repeatedly contrasts one American diplomat's fluency with other

diplomats' lack of language skills and suggests that this was a major reason for the lack of insight into Iranian popular attitudes toward the monarchy. However, even the most expert collectors would have found it difficult to overcome Iranians' fear that the shah's intelligence and security organization, SAVAK, was omnipresent.

Anderson highlights how the shah's opponents shaped public opinion against him as the revolution progressed: "mythology and falsehoods and propaganda took over." (214) Iranians were very susceptible to influence initiatives, believing rumors about elites exfiltrating their wealth and SAVAK being responsible for the death of Ayatollah Khomeini's gluttonous son. International organizations exaggerated claims about human rights abuses and political prisoners, while Western media readily accepted claims about dead demonstrators: "History has shown this was almost always wrong." (416–17) On what would become known as Black Friday, the opposition claimed that thousands died when soldiers fired on demonstrators in Tehran's Jaleh Square, though the number was almost certainly far lower. (214–15) The regime was blamed for the Cinema Rex fire in August 1978 that reportedly killed hundreds, but religious zealots later admitted to setting the fire. (195, 199)

While this is a good book for the general reader, others are better sources for specialized knowledge. Charles Kurzman's *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (2004) provides greater insight into how the Iranian revolution occurred and provides a useful a guide to evaluating the stability of other authoritarian regimes. Robert Jervis' *Why Intelligence Fails* (2011) remains the best publicly available work about the US Intelligence Community's shortcomings with respect to pre-revolutionary Iran.

The reviewer: Dr. William Samii, is the senior intelligence officer for Iran in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State. ∎

For many years, I studied and wrote professionally about Iran, from its history to its culture and politics. In so doing, I read a great many books about its Islamic revolution of 1979 and, quite frankly, was not exactly eager to read another and doubted that there was really a need for one. Which is to say, I was a bit skeptical as I began reviewing Scott Anderson's latest book, *King of Kings*, thinking he would be forced to rehash old stories rather than tell new ones. I could not have been more wrong.

Anderson, an accomplished journalist and writer, has a knack for telling sweeping stories through the personal experiences of key figures. One of his earlier books, *The Quiet Americans*, was a compelling history of early CIA operations that focused on the trials and tribulations of four agency officers who participated in them. *King of Kings* is quite similar, though this time Anderson spreads his attention across a wider field of players encompassing Iranians, Americans, and others. Through a combination of solid research—including interviews with survivors—keen insights, and riveting prose, he once again has produced a book worthy of close examination by intelligence professionals, national security decisionmakers, and other students of history.

Anderson's key argument, as revealed in his subtitle, is that hubris, delusion, and miscalculation all contributed to the collapse of the US-aligned Pahlavi monarchy and its replacement by a virulently anti-American regime. Bouncing between Tehran and Washington—with occasional forays to Langley, the Paris suburbs, and Iran's provinces—Anderson details the ways in which everyone from senior figures to ostensibly minor players laid the groundwork for the revolution.

A particularly noteworthy accomplishment is the author's description of how the relationship between the United States and Iran evolved, particularly in the 1970s. He argues convincingly that during a decade that saw several "oil shocks" resulting in economic turmoil and long lines at US gas stations, successive US administrations sought to mollify the shah to use his influence to keep oil supplies high and prices low. Coming shortly after the Nixon administration's decision to grant him virtually unlimited access to US arms, the massive influx of oil wealth Iran experienced during the decade made the shah one of the world's most profligate purchasers of advanced weaponry, mostly US-made. These two factors—the shah's vital role in manipulating oil prices and in purchasing US arms—made many US officials and business leaders dependent on the Iranian king. Anderson estimated

that by 1975, some 50,000 Americans lived and worked in Iran. "In this relationship," Anderson wrote, the shah was "no longer the nervous schoolboy sharing a couch with Franklin Roosevelt; he was the King of Kings. And Iran was no longer the client state. That status belonged to the United States." (96)

Because of this newfound dependency on the shah's regime, Anderson argues, the US government sought to accommodate him in ways that effectively blinded Washington to his personal faults—especially his paranoia and inability to make hard decisions—as well as his standing with the Iranian people. For example, he writes how both foreign journalists and diplomats suffered immediate consequences from a vindictive shah for even a hint of criticism of him or his rule. US diplomat and later hostage Michael Metrinko, for example, made valiant efforts in the first half of 1978 to report from Iran's provinces the rise in violent anti-shah protests but was effectively silenced by senior figures at the US Embassy in Tehran—under pressure from both Washington and the palace—who were committed to a narrative that the shah was both popular and strong. Similarly, at the State Department, Iran desk officer Henry Precht feared that the shah's regime was losing its grip months earlier than others in the Carter administration did, but he largely self-censored his opinion because of the prevailing belief—and necessity, in the eyes of many—that the shah's rule would last for years to come. Precht later admitted to Anderson that he lied on national television when he said in late 1978, just weeks before the collapse, that the shah was firmly in control, mostly out of a fear for professional self-preservation. (268)

In addition, the US Intelligence Community—along with the rest of the US government, academia, and foreign liaison services—simply miscalculated in assessing the shah's grip on power. Anderson is not the first to make this argument, but he adds insightful anecdotes to explain how it happened. For example, in 1977, Anderson writes, CIA officers in Iran asked Metrinko if he could assist them by expediting US visa applications for some of their most valuable Iranian assets. "Excuse me, Mr. Intelligence Officer," he jokingly recalled, "but what does it tell you when your most important sources are trying to get the hell out of the country?" (111) Anderson also recounts

that although CIA had one of its largest overseas contingents in Iran at the time, the agency was focused almost entirely on the Soviet target to its north, not on domestic Iranian affairs. (93) In fairness, he also allows that even though a CIA assessment from 1977 wrongly concluded that the shah would rule for years to come, because of his powerful security services and massive military, "at that time it would have seemed the height of foolishness to suggest otherwise." (*xix*)

Another strength of *King of Kings* is the author's depiction of the shah and his inner circle in the years before the revolution. Through interviews with his widow, Empress Farah—now living in the United States—as well as extensive secondary research, Anderson explores the Iranian king's hold on power and his dependence on key advisers, especially longtime friend and confidant Asadollah Alam. Within a sycophantic palace culture that grew only worse with time, Alam was one of the few people who could speak somewhat bluntly to the shah and influence his thinking. It was Alam whom many argued had made difficult decisions in the shah's name in previous crises, helping him maintain his throne. After Alam's death from cancer in early 1978, Anderson argues, virtually no one could break through the shah's paranoia and self-delusions or spur him to effective action in the face of a growing popular revolution.

One of Anderson's most compelling characters is Ibrahim Yazdi, an Iranian-American doctor who joined Khomeini's staff and served as one of his key spokesmen while the cleric lived in the outskirts of Paris in the final months of his exile. Anderson relays in vivid detail how Yazdi and his moderate, pro-democracy cohorts convinced themselves that working with Khomeini—of whom they knew little and understood less—was a risk worth taking if they could remove the shah from power. When first informed of Khomeini's statements from years before that the only legitimate government is a Muslim theocracy led by senior clerics, they called them fabrications created by the shah's regime. (345) Only after Khomeini centralized power around himself, disparaged the concept of democracy as "Western" and thereby "false," and authorized show trials and mass executions of the shah's lieutenants did Yazdi begin to see how mistaken he had been. He would spend much of his remaining

years in Iranian prisons for opposing the clerical dictatorship's policies, regretting his role in helping Khomeini's rise to power. (421)

Colin Powell's famous Pottery Barn analogy from the days before the 2003 US invasion of Iraq—"If you break it, you buy it"—also applied to Iran, at least for those who opposed the shah. After CIA and British intelligence worked together to engineer the shah's return to power in 1953 and with each passing year of Western support for his rule, in the eyes of his opponents, the West—especially the United States—effectively "owned" whatever mistakes the Iranian leader made. George Braswell, an American missionary to Iran in the late 1960s, recalled, "I didn't know anything about our role in that coup, and I don't think most Americans did. But, boy, the Iranians sure did. They all talked about it and I think it was the source of a lot of resentment." (94) This is not a new assertion; entire books have been written recounting the ways that Iranians felt betrayed by the United States because of 1953. But Anderson's contribution here is Braswell's recollection that Americans—even those thousands working in Iran as late as the 1970s—were largely ignorant of the dominant US role in Iran's politics and the animosity it inspired among many Iranians. More broadly, Anderson reminds readers that covert actions, even from those early days when practitioners and policymakers expected the "covert" part to hold for years to come, do not stay secret forever.

By now it's evident that Anderson spends a great deal of time rehashing aspects of the Iranian revolution that have been covered elsewhere. This is only a mild critique, however, because the main strength of *King of Kings* is that he has successfully synthesized others' arguments into one sweeping narrative that he combines with his own, fresh observations and should make his book required reading on the subject for years to come.

The reviewer: Dr. Brent Geary is a CIA historian. ∎

intelligence officer's bookshelf

Compiled and reviewed by Hayden Peake unless otherwise noted.

General

Backroom Deals in Our Backyard: How Government Secrecy Harms Our Communities and the Local Heroes Fighting Back
By Miranda S. Spivack
(The New Press, 2025) 221 pages, notes, index.

"This book is about secrecy but also about power," Miranda Spivack declares in the concluding chapter of her new book, *Backroom Deals in Our Backyard: How Government Secrecy Harms Our Communities and the Local Heroes Fighting Back*. (151) An accomplished journalist and former Fulbright Scholar who specializes in government accountability and secrecy, Spivak offers up a brisk, well-told account of five "accidental activists" who for a variety of reasons find themselves try to prise information from local governments and vested interests. Spivack puts their challenge down to the perils of secrecy: "meeting in secret; failing to announce their agendas ahead of time; refusing to respond to requests from the public for information about what they are doing and the documents they are using; ignoring public concerns about issues involving health and safety; and violating individual civil rights by failing to address their constituents' concerns about the dangers they may be fostering by keeping secrets." (xxvii) Well, yes and no.

The justness of their efforts and the personal sacrifices of these accidental activists are not in question. Michael Hickey uncovers how industrial waste has poisoned the water of Hoosick Falls, New York. Richard Boltuck of Bethesda, Maryland, discovers what traffic planners and road builders knew about a notoriously dangerous intersection. Diane Cotter faces down firefighter union and trade groups in Massachusetts to expose the carcinogens in the gear meant to keep firefighters safe. In Alabama, Ben Eaton takes on powerful government and industry alliances to try to clean up his town's noxious, antiquated sewage system, while in New York, Glenn Rodriguez battles against the "new blue wall" of algorithms keeping him in prison. Each of Spivak's protagonists encounter a welter of laws, practices, and conflicts of interests that cloud transparency and stymie change. Moreover, we're reminded that activism, however admirable from afar, sunders personal and professional relationships, empties bank accounts, and saps enormous amounts of time and energy.

Whether Spivack's framing of the challenges that her local heroes face as principally a problem of secrecy, not other factors of which secrecy is derivative, is more contestable. *Backroom Deals*, with its engaging narrative arc, moves the reader along swiftly from one case to the other. But there's little time to consider alternative viewpoints, interrogate assumptions, or engage the substantial body of academic literature on secrets and secrecy that has appeared in *Studies in Intelligence*, *Teaching Secrecy,* and *Intelligence and National Security*, among other journals. Secrets can conceal malfeasance, but they can also enable sharing among trusted communities of practice (like the Intelligence Community and its customers, or city planners and their contractors) and preserve freedom of action (to conduct covert operations, or to select a site for a new corporate headquarters). The issues that activists encounter in their backyards might be systemic and institutional, but they might also be individual results of people trying, and failing, to balance between two rights. Their stories earn *Backroom Deals in Our Backyard* a place on the ethics bookshelf of intelligence practitioners, but it ought to be joined with works like Georg Simmel's *The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies*, Sissela Boks' *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*, and Cécile Fabre's *Spying Through a Glass Darkly: The Ethics of Espionage and Counter-Intelligence* that provide a foundational understanding of secrecy in civic life.

The reviewer: Joseph Gartin is the managing editor of *Studies in Intelligence*. ∎

Creating Mission Impact: Essential Tradecraft for Innovators at CIA and Beyond
By Joe Keogh, Joe Ball, and Greg Moore
(Amazon, 2024), 264 pages, endnotes, appendix, photos.

Facebook's "Like" button and 3M's Post-it Notes are the result of innovation, an endeavor desired in most enterprises, though its attributes are not always understood. *Creating Mission Impact* was written to help overcome that problem in the intelligence world, and its three authors are, according to James C. Lawler, retired CIA operations officer and "Trailblazer," "among the most innovative CIA officers of the last several decades."

The authors acknowledge that although many books and articles have been written about innovation *Creating Mission Impact* is justified because its focus is different: It is primarily intended for rank-and-file members of the CIA and draws on decades of historical examples to which intelligence officers can easily relate. The result is an enlightening account of an often puzzling concept.

The narrative begins by recognizing that "innovation fundamentally means change, and change means pain and disruption, as well as winners and losers, and many will resist it." Therefore, the authors define innovation —especially for mission driven organizations—as "change that has a positive mission impact." (5) A more intuitive view of innovation is that it often follows the thought that "there has to be a better way." (18) *Creating Mission Impact* conveys its message using real-world case studies from CIA, military, and civilian organizations. The first chapter provides basic illustrative examples in each of these areas. One describes how the Navy solved the problem of gunnery accuracy in rolling seas. Another tells how the Air Force learned to retrieve film from an orbiting satellite. A third example deals with the improvement of methods to disguise humans in denied areas by Tony Mendez.

Succeeding chapters discuss issues concerned with the internet, secret writing, repurposing of existing products, and methods of agent communication in hostile environments. These topics are supplemented with important and detailed commentary on briefing new concepts, the difficulties of dealing with bureaucracies, the need to persevere when confronting "we've always done it this way" opposition, the key role of assumptions and the wording of the problem, the recognition that failure often precedes success, and the role of managers in achieving an atmosphere that foster innovation. *Creating Mission*

Impact is an innovative book about a much-advocated, less-realized concept. Well written and thought provoking, it is a very important contribution.■

Decolonizing Global Intelligence: Emerging Intelligence Trends and the Practice of Inclusive Statecraft
By Pak Nung Wong
(Routledge, 2025) 251 pages, end of chapter notes, index.

Book titles usually provide clues to the subject matter between the coverds. *Decolonizing Global Intelligence* is an exception, raising the question: "What does the title mean?" Author and University of Bath political scientist Pak Nung Wong never provides a direct answer.

He does say that the present world situation requires a "new intelligence practice that he calls 'decolonizing global intelligence.'" (4) Or, as he also writes, for the "Global South and Global North to "decolonize global intelligence" means to bring the hegemonic state-building project back into future intelligence analyses in order to anticipate how this pattern of perpetual geopolitical conflicts will unfold." (5)

He goes on to state, in order "to remedy the global intelligence community from this 'coloniality of power,' this book proposes to decolonize global intelligence and put forward a new intelligence practice of 'inclusive statecraft,' which aims to achieve global security intelligence resolutions for the world of perpetual conflicts featured by geo-economic fragmentation and great power decoupling and superpower geopolitical rivalry in the European and Asian rimland." (247) The methods for achieving these aims are not specified. (247)

While lacking specifics, he notes that "this book will not just add new knowledge to the larger field of security and intelligence studies, but will also pioneer the relatively underdeveloped fields of comparative intelligence cultures and interstellar intelligence/cultural studies. It will be indispensable for policymakers, bureaucrats and government officials." (1) Although he goes on to examine current foreign relations conflicts, their link to decolonization remains muddled, lacking even intuitive meaning. The term "interstellar intelligence" is never defined or mentioned again.

The substance of *Decolonizing Global Intelligence* discusses what Wong labels as "Western and non-West-

ern political, cultural and professional intelligence issues." His perspective is unusual, even esoteric. For example, consider the response to the questions: "What are the persistent trends of human intelligence development in the U.K. and U.S.? What is the key intelligence culture in the U.K. and U.S.?" The answers can be found, he writes, "by analyzing Western human intelligence culture in light of Western political realism … through the realist lens of Thomas Hobbes and Niccolo Machiavelli for a more integrative edifice of realism for contemporary intelligence practice in the West. The first goal of this comparative theoretical examination is to identify the theological and human nature assumptions shared by the two Western political realists in the 'realist liberation' of human intelligence operations. I will argue that the enduring Christian concept of 'human fallibility' constitutes the bedrock for realist covert human intelligence operations among such Western powers as the U.K. and the U.S." (103)

Not all of the topics Wong covers have the same degree of clarity. His chapters on China's penetration of US universities and its worldwide intelligence ambitions are straightforward, although they do not mention decolonization, Hobbes, or Machiavelli.

Decolonizing Global Intelligence is not an introductory text. Future editions should include definitions of terms and less political science jargon. ∎

Problematising Intelligence Studies: Towards a New Research Agenda
Edited by Hager Ben Jaffel and Sebastian Larsson (Routledge, 2022), 266 pages, end of chapter notes, index.

The contributors to *Problematising Intelligence Studies* are academics from France, England, Sweden, and New Zealand. All have extensive backgrounds in the social sciences and international relations, which they apply to the problems of modern intelligence.[a]

A central theme of the study is that post-Cold War "intelligence has undergone social, political, and technical changes, and has become an inescapable dimension of the everyday … activities carried out by professionals of intelligence" and experienced in our everyday lives. The changes are the result of the introduction of cell phones,

encrypted communications, facial recognition devices, surveillance techniques, algorithms to detect specific behavioral patterns, the admonition to report anyone or anything "suspicious," our leisure activities, "indeed even the colour of our skin." (3) Consequently the post-Cold War intelligence process requires modification.

The articles in this volume attempt to "open up a new research agenda on contemporary intelligence … which problematises IS [intelligence services] by placing the social relations and practices of intelligence at the heart of the analysis." In language that is not always intuitively clear, the editors suggest this can be accomplished by "departing from the social and the practical and adopting a transdisciplinary mindset, it becomes impossible to accept the IS' tendencies towards Anglo-American-centrism and its long history of favouring and (re) producing functionalist and performance-focused research questions." (252)

That this assessment means that aspects of Anglo-American intelligence should be revised to include the influence of sociological factors is supported by the inclusion of this approach in each chapter. In some cases examples of what needs to be done are merely discussed before recommendations are made. In others, e.g. "US and Swedish intelligence" services cooperation, they "are far closer socio-politically and more interdependent practically and technologically than existing IS scholarship indicates." (247)

Problematising Intelligence Studies is not an easy read. The contributors sociological background is evident in the vocabulary they use. The social-science term "problematises," for example, is never defined. We can infer the authors mean dealing with aspects of the intelligence process new to the writer's experience. And statements like "'How everything became intelligence and intelligence became the everyday' neatly sums up the transformations of intelligence in a post-Cold War and post-11 September 2001 context," will remain ambiguous to some. (3) Nevertheless, in addition to the suggestions offered, what is valuable about this book is that these scholars have expressed a serious, thought-provoking interest in the intelligence profession as it affects society. ∎

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a. Editors Hager Ben Jaffel and Sebastian Larrson contributed to "Collective Discussion: Toward Critical Approaches to Intelligence as a Social Phenomenon," *International Political Sociology* 14 (2020), reviewed by Joseph Gartin, Studies in Intelligence 66, No. 3 (September 2022).

Treason, Terrorism, and Betrayal: Why Individuals Cross the Line
William Costanza
(Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2025) 279 pages, acronyms and abbreviations, endnotes, bibliography, index.

Perhaps as long as there have been groups of people living and working together, and surely as long as there have been recorded accounts, the harshest penalties have been reserved for individuals who violate the bonds of political communities through betrayal and violence. Emperor Constantine VII's *De Administrando Imperio*, a kind of advice manual written in 948–952 CE for his son and successor Romanus II, recounts the fate of one military governor who revealed the workings of a fearsome secret weapon known as Greek fire:

And it happened once, as wickedness will still find room, that one of our military governors, who had been most heavily bribed by certain foreigners, handed over some of this fire to them; and since God could not endure to leave unavenged this transgression, as he was about to enter the holy church of God, fire came down out of heaven and devoured and consumed him utterly. And thereafter mighty dread and terror were implanted in the hearts of all men, and never since then has anyone, whether emperor, or noble, or private citizen, or military man, or any man of any sort whatever, ventured to think of such a thing, far less to attempt to do it or bring it to pass.

Alas, the fear of gruesome punishment, divine or earthly, has never been enough to deter everyone all the time. But why? What makes people turn their backs on their own communities or attack others without regard to justice? And why do intelligence communities worldwide—with their intensive personnel vetting and monitoring processes and expansive collection capabilities that would awe emperors past—sometimes fail to anticipate, detect, and prevent attacks, with catastrophic effects?

William Costanza, an intelligence scholar and former CIA operations officer, tackles these questions and more in his ambitious, well-sourced, and eminently useful *Treason, Terrorism, and Betrayal: Why Individuals Cross the Line*. At the outset, Constanza acknowledges that he is addressing three distinct kinds of threats: counterintelligence threats posed by foreign governments that seek to obtain classified information from US governmental institutions and private-sector partners; violent extremism, foreign or domestic; and the unauthorized disclosure of classified information. (3) A reader might justifiably object that these disparate phenomena (involving state and individual actors, in particular) cannot easily be bound together, but Costanza defends his approach by arguing that all involve "crossing the line," which we can generally understand in a national security context as making a *conscious decision* that will ultimately pose a threat to US national security and then *taking an action.* (5, emphasis in original)

Taking a behavioralist approach to understanding his subjects, backed up by his thorough review of the literature and drawing in part on work by some notable *Studies in Intelligence* contributors like Dr. Ursula Wilder and Randy Burkett, Costanza presents well-documented case studies beginning with "Spying for the Enemy" (Chapter 3) through "Insiders Who Crossed the Line" (Chapter 7). Along the way, familiar names emerge from the sorry annals of espionage and violence—Robert Hanssen, Larry Chin, Jonathan Pollard, Nidal Hasan, Timothy McVeigh, Chelsea Manning, Ana Montes, and Richard Snowden—along with more recent entries like would-be presidential assassins Thomas Crooks and Ryan Routh or Cuban penetration Victor Manual Rocha. Costanza eschews the casually drawn and often biased portraits of these individuals that often appear in popular accounts of espionage and counterterrorism; instead, he backs up his judgments with considerable research and thoughtfulness. For anyone hoping for easy preventatives, Costanza notes that emerging research "suggests that the process of crossing the line is driven by emotion to satisfy a psychological need, and that a deep-rooted belief system is not necessarily the determining factor in influencing an individual's decision…." (140)

Treason, Terrorism, and Betrayal is a unique and important contribution to the study of an enduring problem. Anyone responsible for building a trusted workforce or safeguarding the United States from foreign or insider threats will find it an essential reference.

The reviewer: Joseph Gartin is the managing editor of *Studies in Intelligence.* ■

US Intelligence Failure and Knowledge Creation: Improving Intelligence Analysis
By Carl W. Ford, Jr. and Kathleen M. Vogel
(Routledge, 2025) 181 pages, end notes.

"The central problem constituting US intelligence failure is the lack of research within US intelligence."(2)

In *US Intelligence Failure and Knowledge Creation*, authors Carl Ford and Kathleen Vogel present a well-written, thoroughly documented account in support of their hypothesis.

The book draws heavily on Ford's intelligence experience, which began as a military intelligence officer in Vietnam, followed by service in both the DIA and CIA as a military analyst on China. He then took various high-level positions, including as head of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR). He is currently a consultant on intelligence analysis issues. Co-author Vogel is a professor at Arizona State University in the School for Future of Innovation in Society. She met Ford while conducting research concerning intelligence failures before the 2003 Iraq War.

Expanding on their initial premise, the authors state: "Although it might come as a shock to hear, the US intelligence community does not have a research capability that combines multi-year analyses and focused studies with multiple datasets, different types of information, and expertise, to provide a holistic understanding of security threats and the security environment facing the United States." (2) They argue that despite multiple efforts to reform the IC, this remains the principal reason CIA

and DIA were wrong about 9/11, the Iraq War in 2003, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Russian military and the Ukrainian people before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. They do not discuss potential contributing reasons such as procedural failures.

The authors draw on Ford's wide experience to provide examples of what basic research data is, how it is collected, and how it is used to strengthen the intelligence product. They argue that the only organization in the IC that routinely employed this method and whose estimates were more accurate as a result was INR.

In the event other IC organizations need to follow that precedent, *US Intelligence Failure and Knowledge Creation* makes recommendations for rebuilding research capabilities Ford and Vogel suggest will increase the quality of intelligence analysis in the IC. (150) In doing so, they discuss the impact of the contemporary problems posed by AI and politicalization and note that all these issues are fundamental and thus apply to Five Eyes intelligence nations.

A thought-provoking, immensely valuable contribution to the profession. ∎

History

Admiral Canaris: How Hitler's Chief of Intelligence Betrayed the Nazis
By David Alan Johnson
(Prometheus Books, 2024) 254 pages, endnotes, photos, index.

The military-intelligence service in the German army from 1920 to 1944—the Reichswehr and later the Wehrmacht—was called the Abwehr. It was responsible for foreign espionage and sabotage in addition to Army security and counterintelligence. Its chief from 1935 to 1944 was Adm. Wilhelm Canaris, the subject of several WWII studies.

Author David Alan Johnson provides another account of Canaris, which argues that in addition to his intelligence duties, "he saved the lives of several hundred Jewish refugees and other racial and political 'undesirables' by rescuing them from Nazi Germany and other Nazi-occupied countries." (7) Johnson documents how Canaris helped a rabbi from Warsaw, Yitzhak Yosef Schneerson, escape the Nazis, but he provides no direct evidence that he helped hundreds of others.

Johnson suggests two reasons for this, one specific, the other implied. The first is his recognition that "[N]o records exist that give the exact number of Jews and other refugees whom Admiral Canaris helped to escape the Nazis," (8) The second reason is illustrated by the following example: Johnson writes that "[I]n March 1941, the head of the Abwehr section in The Hague approached Canaris with an idea for rescuing hundreds of Jewish residents in the Netherlands. Admiral Canaris approved the plan, and the transporting of about five hundred Jews began in May." (8) But he does not cite a source. This pattern is repeated throughout the book with one variation: When an endnote are provided, none speak directly to Canaris or the Abwehr saving the lives of anybody.

To better understand Canaris the man, Johnson reviews the admiral's career, including his early support and later opposition to Hitler, his professional conflicts with the Gestapo and the SS that led to his arrest and execution, and his cautious cooperation with allied intelligence during the war.

Johnson concludes that Adm. Wilhelm Canaris's role in rescuing Jews has largely been overlooked, in spite of the fact that his rescue campaign was highly effective. If true, he needs to provide the evidence in the next edition.■

Lincoln's Lady Spymaster: The Untold Story of the Abolitionist Southern Belle Who Helped Win the Civil War
By Gerri Willis
(Harper, 2025), 266 pages, endnotes.

Gerri Willis is a Fox Business correspondent and TV anchor. While reading during the Covid lockdown she came upon the name Elizabeth Van Lew, a Richmond woman who spied for the Union during the Civil War because she thought slavery was wrong.

Intrigued, Willis made inquiries and decided to write her own version of Van Lew's story. The result, *Lincoln's Lady Spymaster: The Untold Story of the Abolitionist Southern Belle Who Helped Win the Civil War* is untrue in an important respect: Van Lew's story was not "untold." Willis' source notes cite several other biographies of Van Lew that tell her story well, and Willis adds nothing new, at least none that are sourced. In fact, she includes much unattributed, speculative commentary about Van Lew.

Willis describes Van Lew's personal life and tells how she became a Union intelligence source. In addition, she describes how Van Lew developed and handled agents, the initiative demonstrated in hiding soldiers, and how she communicated intelligence to the North. *Lincoln's Lady Spymaster* also provides historical context by discussing the contribution of other agents, male and female of both sides, to the Civil War. She describes events and personalities of the day, including John Brown, John Wilkes Booth, Allan Pinkerton, Belle Boyd, Rose Greenhow, and Harriet Tubman.

There are many unsourced comments in the book that beg the question: How does she know this? For instance, Willis writes that "Supreme Court Justice John Marshall was a guest [of Van Lew's], as were Swedish opera star Jenny Lind and Edgar Allan Poe, who thrilled guests by reading 'The Raven' aloud in the Van Lew parlor." (14) No source is cited.

Willis gives a good account of Van Lew's life after the war, when she experienced difficulties supporting herself and her family. She was eventually given a government clerkship in Washington, but that didn't go well and she returned to Richmond in 1887 where she endured the disdain of her neighbors even in her final days. Elizabeth Van Lew died on September 25, 1900, at the age of 81. (237)

The book contains a fine epilogue, which tells what happened to the many characters mentioned in Van Lew's story. ■

The Spy Archive: Hidden Lives, Secret Missions, and the History of Espionage
By Dexter Ingram
(IN Network, 2025) 216 pages, references, photos, no index.

After service as a naval flight officer, Dexter Ingram joined the State Department where he held a number of high-level counterterrorism-related positions at home and abroad during his career. In retirement, he founded the "IN Network, a nonprofit dedicated to mentoring promising young minds of all backgrounds interested in careers in national security." (216) *The Spy Archive* is intended to support that goal by going beyond the "sanitized history textbooks to uncover the buried stories and the real reasons nations went to war, made peace, or betrayed allies." (2) Some self-inflicted difficulties diminish the degree of success he achieved.

Unlike many archives, Ingram's is not based on primary sources, although occasional secondary sources are cited. Instead, it is a collection of anecdotes, mostly undocumented entries that reflect his impressions, some describing impossible conditions. For instance, he asks: "What if I told you history's biggest turning points weren't decided by the generals whose statues fill our parks, but by people whose names we'll never know?" [emphasis added] (1) No examples are provided.

In another case, he suggests espionage is "the decoder for today's headlines. Many of those global hotspots burning on your news feed started with some spy's report filed decades ago. Once you understand these old games, today's baffling politics suddenly make a weird kind of sense." (2) None of the events discussed exemplify this view.

Another feature of the book is Ingram's frequent use of speculative commentary. How can he possibly have known that "Machiavelli knew something most politicians today still haven't figured out: Information beats money, armies, or fancy titles every time"? (45)

These cautionary remarks are intended to stimulate reader awareness that what they are about to read does not "uncover the buried stories and the real reasons nations went to war," as Ingram suggests. But for those new to the subject, *The Spy Archive* presents an impressive introductory account of espionage from pre-biblical times to the present. Some stories do not appear often in the literature. Examples include, Genghis Khan's spy empire, Japan's Shinobi "geniuses at setting up massive intelligence networks," (34) and the American Revolution spy James Armitage Lafayette. More recent topics include wartime intelligence, the varied contributions of women, espionage technology, post-World War II agents (often incorrectly called "double agents"), espionage ethics, intelligence in the information age including AI, and the international Five Eyes intelligence network. (172) Ingram also discusses spy fiction, although not all will agree with his assessment that John le Carré's masterpiece was *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* and not *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*.

The Spy Archive is an interesting but weakly documented summary that too often screams for an answer to the question: "How do you know that?" ∎

The Spy Who Helped the Soviets Win Stalingrad and Kursk: Alexander Foote and the Lucy Spy Ring
By Chris Jones
(Pen & Sword Books, Ltd., 2025) 206 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

The Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra) was a name assigned to a number of clandestine radio networks in Switzerland transmitting information to Soviet military intelligence early in WWII. Chris Jones is a retired academic in Liverpool, United Kingdom. The author of a history of brain surgery and neurology, he has a parallel interests in the psychology of spying. When he read V.E. Tarrant's, *The Red Orchestra* and learned about Alexander Alan Foote, the Liverpool native and WWII Soviet agent, Jones was surprised; he had never heard of Foote and decided to make his own inquiries.

Jones soon found other books, articles, and reports about Foote's exploits including a CIA study, which he does not identify, recently released MI5 files and Foote's memoir, *Handbook for Spies*, which he discovered was actually written by an MI5 officer with Foote's permission. MI5 clearly shaped Foote's account. The principal constraints were that it not mention, or hint, at his connection to the Security Service and that his book end after he left the Russian Zone in Berlin for the West.

The Spy Who Helped the Soviets Win Stalingrad and Kursk is a more complete and critical account of how Foote came to be in Berlin and what happened to him afterward.

Born into a middle class family in 1905, Foote held odd jobs after finishing school and encountered leftist views. In 1935, he enlisted for six years in the Royal Air Force. Less than a year later he deserted to join the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. Returning to London in 1938, Foote was recruited first by the Communist Party of Great Britain and then by Soviet intelligence.

Jones deals with Foote's subsequent espionage activities in some detail. Beginning in 1939, he was sent to Switzerland to work under Ursula Kuczynski (Sonya) and trained as a radio operator. Early in the war, Foote became one of the three radio operators in the Rote Drei (Red Three) network under Sandor Rado that produced valuable intelligence for the Soviets. (41)

By November 1943, Swiss intelligence had identified the Rote Drei transmitting sources and Foote was arrested. He was bailed out and fled to Moscow via Paris. After lengthy debriefings, the Soviets sent him to Germany to continue his work. He arrived in Berlin in March 1947, promptly defected to the British and returned to London in August 1947.

Jones adds personal details—featuring appreciation for good food and pretty women— and operaional facts about Foote and those with whom he worked. He discusses many contradtions or undocumented assertions in previously cited sources and adds some corrections from MI5 files. For instance, authors Read and Fisher claimed in their 1980 book *Operation Lucy*, another Rote Drei network, that Foote had been recruited to British intelligence before going to Spain and was a British agent throughout his time in Switzerland. Jones writes that there is little in the National Archives to support this view. (109) Jones offers no explanation for the apparent decision not to prosecute Foote for his desertion from the RAF to go fight in Spain. After his memoir was published, he became a low-grade civil servant in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. He died in 1956.

Jones provides no direct evidence to support his contention that "It is no exaggeration to say that the activities of Alexander Allan Foote ('Jime') may have altered the course of the war on the Eastern Front, in favour of our ally at the time, the USSR," although he clearly did his part. (5)

The book fills some gaps, corrects some errors, but tells little about his Soviet debriefings. A compete biography of Alexander Foote remains to be written. ■

Vigilance is Not Enough: A History of US Intelligence
By Mark M Lowenthal
(Yale University Press, 2025) 832 pages, notes, bibliography, index.

A historian has choices in how material will be presented. They range from the chronological to the thematic and everything in between. History, after all, is just story telling and can be heavy and didactic or lighter and more approachable. This massive book tells a single story over a time period from roughly 1753 to nearly yesterday. The structure is chronological; the subject is the birth and maturation of US intelligence. The material and time period covered necessitate a large book to allow the author to cover the subject, and this book is large, with 642 pages of text.

The style of presentation is one that both the expert and the amateur can easily understand and follow. It flows quickly and logically and covers the essentials without getting bogged down in too much detail. It is easy to read and an excellent account which should be read and retained by anyone who wants a ready reference to how US intelligence developed, who its important players were, and the events that gave birth to or accelerated the development of the US approach to this important subject and where we are today. Documentation in the form of a hundred pages of notes and a 50-page bibliography provide ample substantiation of the events and a rich trove of raw material for further exploration of individual incidents.

The author, who played a role at a significant level in some of the more recent events, does not try to force feed readers with his own views but rather simply says what happened and what decisions were made and by whom. Unlike Europe, the United States did not inherit a philosophy or system of intelligence from a royalist background. We stumbled forward based on pragmatic decisions made by military or political leaders faced with specific challenges. We never even had an organization devoted to intelligence but made it up as we felt the need. It is clear, however, that our system has had the same challenges throughout history and that they continue to exist. Bureaucratic jealousy and infighting, the reluctance of some parts of the government to accept the role of other organizations, and the indifference or even hostility of

some major policymakers. These problems come through loud and clear to the careful reader. Some of these issues date from the creation of agencies including the OSS and CIA and remain unresolved today.

A general history covering a lengthy period must be judicious in the choice of what to include and exclude and how much detail can be covered. This work made excellent choices in this regard. Having lived and worked through many of the more recent incidents, I would have welcomed more detail, but I understand why the author made his choices.

In all, this is an excellent and well-documented one-volume history. It should be required reading for any college level course on US intelligence and deserves a spot on the bookshelves of everyone who follows this subject.

The reviewer: William D. Murray is a retired senior operations officer. ■

Women of Espionage: Inspiring True Stories of Four SOE Agents Instrumental in Altering the Outcome of WWII and Their Harrowing Capture by the Nazis
By Camille Fox
(Self-published, 2023) 189 pages, references, photos, no index.

The British Special Operations Executive (SOE) was created in WWII to conduct irregular warfare—sabotage, subversion and espionage—in Nazi-occupied Europe. One of its cover names was The Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare, a gross misnomer since it employed several thousand women. And, tough less conspicuous, they performed some tasks better than men, with 40 serving in occupied France. Author Camille Fox heard about them from her father, who served in the army in Germany and knew about some who had been held in concentration camps. In *Women of Espionage,* she tells the story of four.

In her introduction, Fox briefly discusses the popularity of spy stories, citing the "notorious double agents like Aldrich Ames [and] Mata Hari," (1) neither of whom was a double agent. But on her chosen subject, she presents a well documented summary of SOE's history and the stories of the women agents: Yvonne Jeanne de Vibraye Baseden (Odette); Eileen Nearne (Rose); Odette Sansom (Lisa) and Noor Inayat Khan (Madeleine).

Since the British armed forces initially had no provision for female members, two organizations were created for them during WWII. The first was called the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY), and the second was the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). For administrative reasons the four subjects of this book served in each organization. Trained as radio operators or couriers, their duties in France sometimes expanded to include agent handling and network management when the men in those position were compromised. Fox tells their stories well.

After varying degrees of operational success, each of the four women were betrayed, captured, and sent to concentration camps by the Nazis. Only three survived their ordeals. Noor Inayat Khan died in Dachau. Fox's account of their horrific experiences displays their extraordinary cunning and courage.

The stories told in *Women of Espionage* have been told before either individually or as part of a more comprehensive account.[a] Fox provides a very good version of four important cases. Though her claim that that these women altered the outcome of the war is doubtful, their bravery is not. ∎

Memoir/Biography

Superspy: Hans Tofte: Intelligence Officer for SOE, OSS, and CIA
By David Foy
(Casemate Publishers, 2025) 213 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

Historian and former intelligence officer David Foy became interested in Hans Tofte while he was writing a biography of Maj. Gen. Charles Willoughby, MacArthur's controversial G-2.[b] His research in English sources revealed occasional references to Tofte, who was born in Denmark. The only biography of Tofte until then had been written by Danish author Henrik Kruger in 2005.[c] It dealt mainly with his life through World War II and was not translated into English. With the help of Google, Foy overcame that obstacle and found recently released material about Tofte's intelligence career in the National Archives. In *Superspy*, Foy integrates these sources to tell the story of one of CIA's most controversial case officers.

Born on April 4, 1911, in Copenhagen, Hans Vilhelm Tofte had by 1940 lived in California; attended the University of Copenhagen; left his studies in 1930 for military service in the Danish Navy; learned Chinese Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, and Korean; and was a member of the Danish underground. Forced to escape Denmark with forged papers, Tofte flew to New York City and contacted William Stephenson, then head of the British Security Coordination Office (BSC), who helped him enlist in the British Army. Initially stationed in Australia, after Pearl Harbor Tofte enlisted as a private in the US Army. By February 18, 1943, he was transferred to OSS and on May 11, 1943, he was given commissioned as an officer.

Foy reviews Tofte's wartime OSS service that led to Yugoslavia, where he worked to supply Tito's forces. Foy explains that in Yugoslavia he showed a trait that would get him in trouble: he did not take well to those who disagreed with him. In Yugoslavia that led him into a major disagreement, which, in turn, led to his involuntary return to the United States. Strongly supported by his OSS colleagues, he nevertheless went on to head the Danish desk in London to supervise operations in Europe, for which he received very good marks.

After the war, Tofte, married by then, experienced civilian life until the Korean War. Initially resistant, he was recalled by his wartime colleague Frank Wisner, then head of the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC, formally part of CIA), for covert action duty in Japan and Korea. In his discussion of these events, Foy incorrectly notes hat "Major" Helms was Wisner's deputy. Helms was never a major—he was a naval officer— and he was chief of operations under Wisner. A later reference to Helms claims he directed "Lyman" Fitzgerald to dismiss an officer, whereas the correct name is Desmond FitzGerald. (159)

Tofte worked to train agents and guerrillas, mostly North Korean refugees, and infiltrate them into North

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a. See for example, Sarah Helm, *A Life in Secret: Vera Atkins and the Missing Agents of WWII* (Alfred Knopf, 2007).
b. Dr. David Foy, *Loyalty First: The Life and Times of Charles A Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief Intelligence Officer* (Casemate Publishers, 2023). See the review by Stephen C. Mercado in *Studies in Intelligence* 67, no. 4 (December 2023).
c. Henrik Kruger, *Den danske krigshelt, der kom til tops i CIA* (The Danish War Hero Who Rose to the Top of the CIA), (Henrik Kruger and Lindhart and Ringhof Forlag, 2005).

Korea and the China region. During this period, he once again had difficulties with fellow officers and especially with MacArthur's G-2, MG Willoughby. Foy adds that Tofte also underestimated the North Koreans and exaggerated claims about his would-be penetration agents that led to his return to CIA Headquarters, where he confessed to deceiving "his superi-ors." (92) Only his operational successes saved his career.

After his Korean service, Tofte returned to civilian life. Because of business contacts, he be-came the subject of an FBI investigation for offenses, including murder, financial fraud, and treason. When recalled to CIA in 1956, he learned that the Office of Security was concerned about his loyalty and even considered the possibility that be was a Soviet agent.

Foy tells how, with the support of colleagues, Tofte resolved these challenges and was assigned to covert operations in Central and South America, which are discussed in some detail. Tofte performed well and return to Headquarters duty in December 1964. Unfortunately, he was again investigated by the FBI and reprimanded by CIA when a single classified document was found at Tofte's former residence. That act forecast the most controversial chapter of Tofte's career.

In 1966, the Toftes decided to sell or rent their Georgetown home. One of the prospective tenants was also a CIA officer. While inspecting the house, he discovered classified documents in Tofte's study and notified the Office of Security. Tofte, by then a GS-16 supergrade, was furious and said that it was common practice for officers at his level to take classified material home while working on projects. CIA did not agree. Refusing any in-house reprimand, Tofte went public, countercharging that those inspecting the documents at his home had stolen his wife's jewels in the process. After a long battle Tofte was dismissed but was allowed to keep his pension. In retirement Tofte, long divorced, traveled, attended retiree events from time to time, and found other feminine companionship. He died on August 24, 1987.

Foy's assessment of Tofte's professional legacy acknowledges his exceptional talent for paramilitary and intelligence operations and his many qualifications as an intelligence officer. But whether he warrants the title "Superspy" is questionable. A valuable contribution with an important contemporary lesson. ∎

Fiction

A Sting in Her Tale
By Mark Ezra
(No Exit Press, 2025).

Maybe it's because the baby boomer readers are aging, but stories about retired women spies seem to be having a moment. First it was Tess Gerritsen's *The Spy Coast* (2023), and now comes film maker and screenwriter Mark Ezra's debut novel, *A Sting in Her Tale*.

The story is told by seventy-something Felicity Jardine (that's what she calls herself, but we never learn her true name or age) and opens as she, tired of life, is about to drown herself in a river in West Sussex. Sliding down the river bank, however, she spots a baby's car seat drifting toward her. Felicity grabs it and rescues the infant occupant. Soon enough, there is a murder and thugs show up in Felicity's village, hunting for the baby.

Felicity, of course, is no ordinary little old English lady. She's retired SIS and in flashbacks alternating with the current story, tells of an operation in Bonn in the 1970s gone bad. There's plenty of gunplay then and now, and Felicity's skills may be a little rusty but she's resourceful enough to escape a few cliffhangers. In the end, past and present come together and it's all wrapped up neatly, albeit with a couple of twists.

A Sting in Her Tale is good fun. Felicity has seen it all and is happy to give a trenchant opinion on just about anything, while Ezra keeps the action moving right along. The only negative is that the explicit sex, which ends with Felicity grateful for an "animalistic passion I had never experienced before or, regrettably, since," is male fantasizing at its most cliched. Perhaps in his next novel Ezra will ask a woman to advise him on that part.

The reviewer: John Ehrman is a retired CIA officer.∎

Rediscovered

The Great Game: Memoirs of the Spy Hitler Couldn't Silence
By Leopold Trepper
(McGraw-Hill, 1977) 442 pages, index, appendices.

How did we miss this one? Leopold Trepper, one of the most significant figures in 20th century espionage, published his memoir in France in 1975 and it appeared in a US edition two years later. *Studies in Intelligence*, for whatever reason, did not review it. Now, some 50 years later, *The Great Game* not only has earned the status of a classic but also ought to be mandatory reading for anyone working in human espionage operations.

Trepper's biography is a microcosm of modern European history. He was a Polish Jew, born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1904, who turned to socialism in the hard years after World War I. On the run from the Polish authorities, he went to Palestine in 1924, where he joined the Palestinian Communist Party and was jailed by the British. In 1929, Trepper was thrown out of Palestine and went to France, where he continued political work until 1932, when he went to Moscow for formal ideological training.

Trepper was in Moscow until 1938, through the years of the purges and terror. He saw friends and fellow students taken away, and witnessed the show trials; much of his account is the story of his disillusion with the reality of the Soviet revolution. Nonetheless, Trepper explains his decision to stick with Moscow and then join Soviet military intelligence—he was recruited by Gen. Jan Berzin, who also recruited Richard Sorge—as the only realistic path. War loomed in Europe, he points out, and only the Soviets were standing firm (at that point, at least) against the Nazis.

In 1937, Trepper proposed a plan to Berzin that was straightforward and audacious. He would build espionage networks across Europe, composed of Communists and dedicated anti-Fascists, that would remain dormant until the war started. Only then would the networks come to life, collecting and transmitting to Moscow "accurate and verified information" from contacts in the "German high command, and in governmental, political, and economic institutions." (89) To establish the networks, Trepper would start an import-export business in Belgium and then expand it to other countries. The branches would run by actual businessmen, unwitting of their roles, thus funding the operation and giving him cover to travel and meet contacts around Europe. After months of preparation—during which Berzin was arrested and executed—Trepper left Moscow in the fall of 1938. (He relates bitterly how the talented Berzin was replaced by incompetent Stalinist hacks.) Now an illegal, documented as Canadian industrialist Adam Mikler, he went to Brussels and founded the Foreign Excellent Trenchcoat Company.[a]

Trepper's plan succeeded brilliantly. He began setting up his branches and Moscow sent agents and specialists to supplement the local Communists. All was in place in the spring of 1940, when the Germans swept through Western Europe. Trepper proudly recounts how his networks quickly began sending Moscow large quantities of high-quality information on German plans, troop movements, and military production. Even better, unexpected opportunities fell into his lap: two companies he had set up to help finance the operation, Simex and Simexco, won contracts with the Todt Organization, which oversaw German military construction projects. Todt provided passes that allowed Simex and Simexco executives to travel freely, and Trepper's networks by 1941 had access to a wide range of talkative Nazi officials.

It was too good to last, of course. The networks were too large and, as a result, their members were hastily recruited and only partially trained and vetted. A breakdown in compartmentation was only a matter of time. The Germans realized in the summer of 1941 that the large numbers of transmissions to Moscow they were intercepting were related. They formed a special counterintelligence unit, a *sonderkommando*, to hunt for what they had christened the *Rote Kapelle* (Red Orchestra). The sonderkommando got its first break that December, rolling up a network in Brussels. Despite Nazi torture, almost none of the arrested members talked; some committed suicide rather than risk breaking. But, inevitably, a few gave in or were turned, and the sonderkommando made steady progress against the networks. In November 1942, they captured Trepper—the "Big Chief"—in Paris.

If this first third of *The Great Game* is an excellent primer on how, and how not, to set up and run a wartime espionage network, then any evaluation of the middle chapters of the book will be more ambiguous. Trepper

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a. The firm is usually rendered in English as the Foreign Excellent Raincoat Company, though Trepper gives it as trenchcoat..Consistent with Trepper's operational plan, it was a subsidiary of a legitimate preexisting company called Le Roi du Caoutchouc (The Raincoat King).

relates a complex tale of strategic deception that starts with his captors telling him how they were already using captured agents and their radios to transmit large amounts of true, and truly valuable, information to Moscow to pave the way for planting false information in future messages. (Anyone who ever doubts an intelligence service will give up high-quality information in a double agent operation needs to read this part.) The Gestapo gave Trepper a simple choice: join their operation, the titular Great Game, or else. In the weeks that followed, Trepper went along with the Germans and steadily gained their confidence until, in January 1943, he was able to slip a warning message to one of the remaining free agents. The alert soon arrived in Moscow, letting the Soviets know of the arrests and German deception.

Trepper continued to play his double (or was it triple?) Great Game until September 1943, when, again taking advantage of the relationships he had developed with his captors, he managed to escape. For the next eleven months he eluded the Germans, crisscrossing France and going from one hideout to the next, with several narrow escapes. He eventually made his way back to Paris, where he hid until Allied forces arrived in August 1944; in November, he returned to Moscow.

Trepper was not looking for a hero's welcome, but only a chance to rest and reunite with his wife and sons. Instead, because of his association with Gen. Berzin, he was soon arrested and spent the next 10 years imprisoned in Lubyanka and other Soviet jails. Trepper by now was familiar with imprisonment, but his understated account of his captivity and interrogations still is harrowing. Eventually he was sentenced to 15 years and then was more or less left alone. His accounts of other prisoners he met, including Vasiliy Stalin's psychiatrist, a former Japanese official who filled him in on what happened to Sorge, and the anti-Bolshevik Russian nationalist historian Vasiliy Shulgin, have a ghoulish fascination.

Trepper was released in 1954 and, finally reunited with his family, returned to Poland. He became prominent in the small remaining Jewish community and, with the publication of Gilles Perrault's history of the Red Orchestra in 1967, achieved recognition for his wartime intelligence work.[a] Unfortunately, however, 1967 was also the year of Israel's lightning victory in the Six-Day War, which led the Polish government to unleash an anti-Semitic campaign that caused most remaining Polish Jews to emigrate. Trepper's family was allowed to leave but he was kept in Poland for six years, subject to constant surveillance and harassment, until an international campaign achieved his release. After all this, Trepper remained loyal, if not to Soviet communism, then to his socialist ideals. He died in Jerusalem in 1982.

The question looming over Trepper's book, as with most espionage memoirs, is whether the account is accurate. The basics seem to be, as CIA's postwar history of the Red Orchestra corroborates Trepper's story. But illegals are not always the most reliable memoirists, and they often leave incomplete accounts or drop material from their original manuscripts when overseeing translations or new editions. In particular, Sorge's biographer, Owen Matthews, calls Trepper an "unreliable narrator," and it is by no means out of the question that Trepper exaggerated, obfuscated, or deleted details of his career, whether out of self-promotion, to protect himself or others, or for ideological reasons. There is, for example, the lingering question of whether Trepper cooperated with the Gestapo more than he admits. Also, Trepper's description of his "American friend, Georgie de Winter," discreetly leaves out the detail that they were lovers and he likely fathered her son, Patrick. (The *Studies* review of Perrault also notes a first wife and family, who make no appearance here.) The reader needs to be alert to the shading of detail and the virtual impossibility of confirming all the details of Trepper's actions while in German custody.

Whatever the accuracy of the small details, this is still a book for anyone with a professional or personal interest in espionage. The lessons about preparation and compartmentation are timeless, as is the unstated point about the need to look skeptically at everything that's going on. On top of that, Trepper (and his ghostwriter or translator) knew how to tell a thrilling story. The spare prose and short chapters keep things moving along and, even if the complex details are sometimes hard to follow, it's not easy to put down. The appendices, where Trepper lists the fates of Orchestra members arrested by the Nazis and reprints farewell letters written by several before their executions, bring home the dedication and bravery of his agents.

Studies overlooked *The Great Game* 50 years ago, but you should not.

The reviewer: John Ehrman is a retired CIA officer.■

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a. It should be noted that the review of Perrault's book in *Studies* was savage. See review of *L'Orchestre Rouge* by Gilles Perrault (Fayard, 1967) in *Studies in Intelligence* 12, No. 4 (1968), 100–104.

Media Reviewed in 2025
Studies in Intelligence

Contemporary Issues

The Academic-Practitioner Divide in Intelligence Studies, edited by Rubén Arcos, Nicole K. Drumhiller, and Mark Phythian (IO Bookshelf, *Studies* 69, 2 [June 2025]), reviewed by Hayden Peake (Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, all reviews listed in "IO Bookshelf" were written by Hayden Peake.)

Authoritarianism: A Very Short Introduction, by James Loxton (IO Bookshelf, *Studies* 69, 2 [June 2025])

The Dictators' Club: How Regional Organizations Sustain Authoritarian Rule, by Maria J. Debre (*Studies* 69, 4 [December 2025]), reviewed by Tony Sutton

Homeland-Security Intelligence: Where We Are, How We Got Here, What Lies Ahead, editors Wesley R. Moy and Kacper T. Gradón (*Studies* 69, 3 [September 2025]), reviewed by Michael J. Ard

General

Backroom Deals in Our Backyard: How Government Secrecy Harms Our Communities and the Local Heroes Fighting Back, by Miranda S. Spivack (IO Bookshelf, *Studies* 69, 4 [December 2025]), reviewed by Joseph Gartin

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Rediscovered

The Great Game: Memoirs of the Spy Hitler Couldn't Silence, by Leopold Trepper (1977) (IO Bookshelf, *Studies* 69, 4 [December 2025]), reviewed by John Ehrman

Fiction

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A Sting in Her Tale, by Mark Ezra (IO Bookshelf, *Studies* 69, 4 [December 2025]), reviewed by John Ehrman

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