

## **Intelligence Officer's Bookshelf—March 2022**

*Compiled and reviewed by Hayden Peake\**

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### **GENERAL**

***Spies, Lies, and Algorithms: The History and Future of American Intelligence***, by Amy B. Zegart

### **HISTORICAL**

***Between Five Eyes: 50 Years of Intelligence Sharing***, by Anthony R. Wells

***Checkmate In Berlin: The Cold War Showdown that Shaped the Modern World***, by Giles Milton

***Love and Deception: Philby in Beirut***, by James Hanning

***Spies and Traitors: Kim Philby, James Angleton and the Friendship and Betrayal that Would Shape MI6, the CIA and the Cold War***, by Michael Holzman

***The Writing of the Gods: The Race to Decode the Rosetta Stone***, by Edward Dolnick (reviewed by J. E. Leonardson)

### **MEMOIR**

***The Recruiter: Spying and the Lost Art of American Intelligence***, by Douglas London



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\* Unless otherwise noted at the end of a review, all have been written by Hayden Peake.

## **General**

***Spies, Lies, and Algorithms: The History and Future of American Intelligence***, by Amy B. Zegart. (Princeton University Press, 2022) 405 pages, endnotes, bibliography, index.

Amy Zegart is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and at Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. Her interest in intelligence was initiated in part by a summer (1993) on the National Security Council staff and continued through contacts in the Intelligence Community (IC) since then. She has written several books on intelligence (391) each identifying weaknesses and advocating various corrective actions. *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms* takes a somewhat different approach by reviewing the history of the subject in light of recent advances in information technology.

The first chapter provides an overview of the book. After discussing the shock of discovering that CIA has a Twitter feed, she identifies the other technological advances such as digital communications, the impact of artificial intelligence, and quantum computing, to name a few, that are contributing to a "moment of reckoning" in the IC. (2) Then she points out that popular understanding of these concepts can be inhibited by "spy-themed entertainment or spytainment" (17) when they serve as primary sources of public knowledge about spying. Her corrective is education to overcome this disparity. Toward that end, she gives a definition of intelligence and reviews the "core missions" of the IC—collection, analysis, and covert action—using the Bin Laden case as an exemplar. (79)

Subsequent, well-documented individual chapters deal with the history of the subject, analytic issues, covert action, counterintelligence, congressional oversight, and the 18 intelligence agencies, including the office of the Director of National Intelligence, in the IC. (73) Topics are illustrated with well known cases.

Counterintelligence, for example, begins with important definitions and then is examined "from the old days to the cyber age" (144) to demonstrate the scope and magnitude of the subject. With one exception it is an accurate review. The exception is the assertion that it "was Philby who taught Angleton the intelligence business." (162) Those who served with Angleton in London have noted that his contacts with Philby were brief and occasional probably due to the great difference in rank.

One topic, open source intelligence (OSINT), appears in several categories, and its value in the internet age, she suggests, warrants "it own agency." (82) Zegart has raised this point before and does not discuss the numerous organizational or practical difficulties such a move would entail in either source. She does devote a chapter to the use of OSINT in the nuclear world, where she acknowledges that the final judgment must rest with the IC experts.

*Spies, Lies, and Algorithms* concludes with a chapter on cyber threats that begins with an intriguing portrayal of recent Russian cyber operations and capabilities in the United States. In Zegart's judgment, "No global threat has been more wide-ranging and faster changing than cyber." (254) It is a battleground like no other. And after explaining how cyber and intelligence are linked, she discusses why "the character of war look[s] entirely different in cyberspace. (259) In dealing with this ever changing world, "intelligence has never been more important or more challenging." (276)

For the general reader and the student, *Spies, Lies, and Algorithms* is an excellent introduction to the subject.

## **Historical**

***Between Five Eyes: 50 Years of Intelligence Sharing***, by Anthony R. Wells. (Casemate Publishers, 2020) 246 pages, endnotes, bibliography, appendix, photos, index.

Anthony Wells studied at Oxford, the Royal Naval College, and the University of London, where he received his doctorate. After joining the Royal Navy, he served both in Washington, DC, and at sea on joint intelligence assignments with the US Navy. Returning to civilian

life, he became a US citizen and worked in the US Intelligence Community with the Department of Defense, the National Reconnaissance Office, the CIA, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. (ix) Thus, by his own account, he is a rare individual who has worked

for British intelligence as a British citizen and US intelligence as a US citizen. Reading this brief background in the introduction to *Between Five Eyes*, raises questions as to the nature of his various intelligence assignments, and one might reasonably expect answers in the succeeding chapters. If so, disappointment quickly follows.

*Between Five Eyes* is a chronological account of the developing relationships among the Five Eyes nations—the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—as perceived by Wells. He describes the Five Eyes connections as the inevitable consequence of the special relationship between the United States and Britain. Then he tells how they progressed from the end of WWII through the Cold War to the present.

As Wells treats the cultural, political, and structural aspects of the relationship, he weaves in commentary about the intelligence connections between the nations. Perhaps because of his personal background, many of the cases he cites are naval in nature. And he says little about the case details while stressing his role. For example, in a discussion of “The Impact of the Walker Spy Ring,” Wells

implies that he warned US intelligence in the 1970s about what turned out to be Walker’s espionage. After charging the IC with complacency in the matter, Wells notes, “In meetings with my opposite number in Washington during the 1970s and early 1980s, it was difficult to convince them otherwise, notwithstanding the contents of one of our significant British intelligence reports that I led, and it was very limited in distribution.” (74–75)

This quotation illustrates the fundamental problems found in this book. First, comments about his role are not sourced. Second, Wells refers to his “opposite number” without giving any indication of his position, organization, or rank. In fact, Wells never reveals these details about himself in or out of the military.

*Between Five Eyes* has a good bibliography and wide subject coverage, though nothing new beyond Wells’ puffed-up, often ambiguous, descriptions of his role in intelligence. The general reader can learn as much about Five Eyes from a Google search; the scholar has a great deal of fact-checking ahead.

***Checkmate In Berlin: The Cold War Showdown that Shaped the Modern World***, by Giles Milton. (Henry Holt and Company, 2021) 377 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

For many people today, mention of Cold War Berlin calls to mind the CIA’s Berlin Tunnel, the omnipresent East German Stasi, the Wall and John le Carré espionage novels. But before each of these events occurred, beginning in early 1945, the armies of the Western Allies and the Soviet Union spent four years establishing and implementing the occupation’s ground rules. It was a challenging endeavor. *Checkmate In Berlin* tells the story.

British author Giles Milton has chosen US Army Col. Frank “Howlin’ Mad” Howley as the principal protagonist. Howley was a cavalry officer assigned to military government duties after suffering a serious back injury. In 1945 he was chosen to head an American team to establish and operate the American sector in Berlin. His contacts with his Soviet counterparts soon convinced him that they were more enemy than friend. He unflinchingly opposed their persistent efforts to drive the Allies out of Berlin, a position not initially shared by his allied peers. His dealing with the Soviets were from then on a mix of resisting and often successfully opposing their attempts to dominate the occupation.

While Howley’s performance was indeed impressive, his story alone does not a book make. Thus, Milton provides both historical and biographical filler. For example, for background, he begins with a lengthy chapter on the Yalta conference. Later he discusses the defection of Igor Gouzenko in Canada to illustrate true Soviet behavior and intentions. And then there is the interesting account of “Hitler’s teeth” (58–59) and the intelligence help Howley received from one David Murphy, who for some reason Milton does not associate with the CIA Berlin Base. Milton also provides details of his boss, General Lucius Clay, his Allied peers and his Soviet adversaries.

One of Howley’s most effective moves against the Soviets occurred during the Berlin Airlift when Howley, in a counterblockade, closed off Soviet access to reparations food and material that had been passing from West Berlin to the East. Now they began to feel the pinch. For Howley checkmate had been achieved.

*Checkmate In Berlin* never makes Howley’s title clear. It also has him dealing with generals responsible for the other sectors of Berlin for his entire four-year tour, a monumental achievement in itself. Curiously, Milton

makes no mention of Howley's promotion to brigadier general in early 1949, an event recorded in Howley's Wikipedia entry, which includes a photograph of General

Clay pinning brigadier's stars to Howley's uniform. This anomaly aside, Milton has produced a very readable and well-documented account of early Cold War history.

***Love and Deception: Philby in Beirut***, by James Hanning. (Corsair, 2021) 408 pages, endnotes, bibliography, photos, index.

Kim Philby, the most famous of the so-called Cambridge spies, married his third wife, Eleanor Brewer, in London in 1959. Philby was on leave from his base in Beirut, where he worked for the *Observer* newspaper and the *Economist* magazine, while secretly still serving as an agent for both MI6 and the KGB. His new wife, only recently divorced from *New York Times* reporter, Samuel Pope Brewer, was herself an accomplished journalist. Like many in Beirut, she had heard the rumors of Philby's treachery, but succumbing to his charm, tended to discount them.

At first Eleanor found married life with Kim exhilarating. But gradually for reasons she didn't understand, his drinking became a problem, and in January 1963 he disappeared. Hanning tells how the British government dealt with the loss, and what they did about Eleanor, who was returned to the UK.

Eleanor eventually made her way to Moscow, where she attempted to rekindle her marriage but was unsuccessful. She returned to the United States in 1965 and died in relative obscurity in 1968.

In 1968, she published an autobiography with the help of British author Patrick Seale, which reveals how she learned the truth and what she did about it. Author James Hanning acknowledges he has drawn "unashamedly" from her book, while adding historical background and other events to help complete her story. (2)

*Love and Deception* doesn't end with Eleanor's death. Hanning goes on to tell of Philby's fourth marriage and some of his discussions with KGB officers about his career. One surprising example concerns the case of Konstantine Volkov, a would-be defector to MI6 in 1945 whom Philby thought had been executed by the KGB after Philby exposed him. According to Hanning, KGB general Yuri Kobaladze told Philby that Volkov was still alive. (349)

*Love and Deception* tells how Eleanor, after growing up in Washington state, joined the Office of War Information (OWI) in WWII and remained in Europe after the war. Traveling extensively. She met and married Sam Brewer, and they had a daughter. When they were assigned to Beirut, she met Kim Philby, one of Sam's colleagues. Hanning describes the curious events that led to their affair and marriage.

*Love and Deception* is well documented and written, and it offers some new vignettes about Philby and his thoughts regarding his fellow Cambridge spies. Is it the last book on Philby? Probably not, though one is hard pressed to imagine what else remains to be said.

***Spies and Traitors: Kim Philby, James Angleton and the Friendship and Betrayal that Would Shape MI6, the CIA and the Cold War***, by Michael Holzman. (Pegasus Books, 2021) 342 pages, endnotes, bibliography, index.

With biographies of Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and James Angleton to his credit, Michael Holzman now turns to Kim Philby and his relationship with James Angleton. Putting aside the title's bizarre assertion that their relationship shaped MI6, the CIA and the Cold War, while allowing that it influenced certain counterintelligence operations in each, *Spies and Traitors* is, with few exceptions, a well written recap of existing accounts of both men.

"counterintelligence tradecraft by Philby." (2) Put another way, he later writes that Angleton "was tutored and for a time in effect supervised in those [CI] matters by Philby." (8) And finally, in his conclusion to the book, Holzman returns to the topic adding, "Having taught the art of counterintelligence to Angleton, Philby had little to fear from him." (264) None of these comments is sourced, and no other reputable author has confirmed the claim, while some have cast well-reasoned doubt on it.

For reasons Holzman never specifies, *Spies and Traitors* perpetuates the myth that Angleton was introduced to

The final chapter in the book discusses the articles Philby wrote while he was living in Beirut and reporting for the *Observer* and the *Economist*. While they do not mention Angleton, Holzman has provided an excellent

summary of Philby's writings on Middle East events of the day in detail not found elsewhere.

For readers new to the Philby and Angleton stories, *Spies and Traitors* provides, with the reservations noted, a useful, single source on the subject.

***The Writing of the Gods: The Race to Decode the Rosetta Stone*** by Edward Dolnick. (Scribner, 2021) 311 pages, notes, illustrations, bibliography, index.

Modern codebreakers, Edward Dolnick tells us, have an important advantage in their work—knowledge of the language of the communications they are trying to decipher. If their decryptations are wrong, the codebreakers see the resulting gibberish and know instantly that they have erred. But what if you are trying to break a code when no one has written or spoken the underlying language for more than a millennium, no one even knows if the language had an alphabet, and data-crunching consists only of the human mind? These were the problems facing generations of scholars who sought to understand the hieroglyphic inscriptions and writings of ancient Egypt.

easy to understand, and his combination of short, focused chapters and concise prose keeps the book moving along. Overall, *Writing of the Gods* is a solid and entertaining popular history.

Dolnick also has much to offer an intelligence audience. At one level, *Writing of the Gods* is a fascinating tale of cryptanalysis. Young and Champollion used the same principles as modern cryptanalysts—the collection of data, searches for patterns and word frequency, and Young's discovery that the Egyptians employed the equivalent of a spell table for foreign names all were echoed in the Venona program—but with no technology more advanced than pen and paper. It is an impressive example of what determination and brainpower can accomplish.

As every schoolchild learns, the French discovery in 1799 of the Rosetta Stone with its parallel Greek, demotic, and hieroglyphic inscriptions provided the key, and the mysteries of hieroglyphics were soon solved. Would that this version of history were so, however. *Writing of the Gods*, Dolnick's account of the decoding of the stone, details how, even with the plain text in view, it took almost 25 years to break the hieroglyphics.

Young and Champollion also made a vital analytical break. Because hieroglyphs had been unreadable, Europeans had over the centuries convinced themselves that they were not just a writing system but must have stood for abstract ideas and concepts, scientific findings, or even mystic truths and cosmic meanings discovered by the ancients and then lost over the centuries. The two men walked away from this and approached the problem afresh and on their own terms. Conventional wisdom is not always wrong, but sometimes when a problem seems unsolvable it helps to forget everything that has been said before.

Dolnick, a journalist specializing in science, is a good storyteller. He focuses on two compelling characters, Thomas Young, an Englishman who made the initial discovery that hieroglyphs represented sounds, and Frenchman Jean-François Champollion, who built on this insight to work out the hieroglyphic alphabet. Champollion then went on to figure out hieroglyphic grammar and the myriad additional characters that indicated gender, explained subtle differences in meaning or, like I♥NY, conveyed a message instantly recognizable to Egyptians but that would not make sense to anyone else. It is a complex story, but Dolnick's explanations of hieroglyphics and the quirks of language are clear and

Readers looking for a fascinating episode in the history of cryptanalysis that has application for today's intelligence work should put *Writing of the Gods* on their list.

*The reviewer:* J. E. Leonardson is the pen name of a CIA Directorate of Analysis officer.

## MEMOIR

***The Recruiter: Spying and the Lost Art of American Intelligence***, by Douglas London (Hachette Books, 2021) 418 pages, index.

The prologue to this memoir by an “inner city Jewish kid from the South Bronx” (90), tells the story of an agent recruitment the author made that epitomizes the operational principles expressed throughout the book. At the same time, applying conditions imposed by CIA classification reviewers that he clearly did not like, London employs mostly pseudonyms, and doesn’t divulge locations, dates, or other descriptive characteristics. Thus, *The Recruiter* is a mix of valuable operating concepts and imprecise circumstantial detail of a more than 34 year career as a CIA operations officer.

London begins his narrative with a description of how he was spotted while attending Manhattanville College, a private school near New York City. Then, after reviewing his recruitment, he describes his training and early assignments at the pre 9/11 CIA Headquarters. But it was during his the post 9/11 service, mostly overseas recruiting agents in Middle East environment, that he found both the professional satisfaction that would dominate his career and the racial discrimination that would tarnish it. Regrettably, the words devoted to the latter taint the tone

of the book, leaving the reader wondering if they also account for his declining a promotion.

London departs from the detail of his own story with criticisms of recent CIA organizational reforms particularly those instituted by former director John Brennan. He views them as advancing bureaucracy while diminishing the importance of the Directorate of Operations. (376ff) Brennan’s successor, Gina Haspel, is only slightly less the recipient of London’s bitterness. (395ff) George Tenet is more favorably treated, though London misspells his name throughout.

The final chapter discusses other CIA functions and attributes that, in his view, need improvement. *The Recruiter* may serve as a useful primer for those not familiar with the differences in the current and pre-9/11 structures of CIA, its workforce, and the agency’s role in the current US Intelligence Community. But while many comments are positive and his operational remarks are constructive, he can’t resist whining about his own treatment, a looming bitterness that is a blemish on the book’s overall value. Read with care.

**Hayden Peake** has served in the CIA’s Directorates of Operations and Science and Technology. He has been compiling and writing reviews for the “Intelligence Officer’s Bookshelf” since December 2002.