

Book Review

A Century of Spies: Intelligence in the Twentieth Century. By Jeffrey T. Richelson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. \$30.00

(U) And now, just when you thought you had seen the last great tome on intelligence history, comes a new offering. Jeffrey Richelson, one of the world's leading authorities on modern intelligence, has produced a wrap-up of an entire century of spying worldwide. (Well, not really, since he leaves out the last five years of the century. But anyway, as he sees it, things are not likely to change substantially before the year 2000.)

(U) Richelson, who now works for the National Security Archive (which produces many of the Freedom of Information Act requests that NSA has to answer), is a well-known researcher on intelligence topics. His previous books on intelligence have been more like encyclopedias or directories of the world's intelligence services than chatty discourses on spying. If you want to know about the intelligence capabilities of a given country but don't have a security clearance, the Richelson shelf in your local library will likely be your first stop.

(U) This time he has attempted a classic history. He starts well, giving the reader an excellent overview of intelligence from 1900 through World War II. But old habits die hard, and when he gets to the post-World War II era, on which he is already a recognized authority, his writing devolves back into the style of his earlier books. In the second half of the book, he describes the leading intelligence services in their various stages of evolution, but he does less well on an incisive assessment of meaning. He is back to writing encyclopedias.

(U) This is not all bad (when viewed by an intelligence outsider, that is). The scope and span of Richelson's research are generally unrivaled by anyone else working in the field, and the amount of really good material in this book makes it almost unique. Moreover, it is all documented, in seventy-five pages of very interesting footnotes. If you want to know how a good researcher finds out about NSA and the other intelligence agencies, read the footnotes.

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(U) But is Richelson another Bamford? Jim Bamford was a product of the 1970s - a suspicious anti-establishment debunker of the intelligence agencies. To his conspiratorial mind, NSA represented a threat to civil liberties, a great octopus with no restraints. Richelson, however, sees the problem differently. To him, intelligence is a very necessary

component of national security. He especially favors technical intelligence (SIGINT, MASINT, and PHOTINT). Not only are they "clean" (as opposed to the "dirty" world of HUMINT and covert actions), but they are effective. The twentieth century belongs to the scientific practitioners of intelligence. He begins the book by discussing the two inventions that revolutionized intelligence - the radio and the airplane. Much of the book subsequently revolves around the intelligence applications of those two devices. While giving agents their due, he feels that SIGINT and PHOTINT are the heart of modern intelligence.

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His treatment of the VENONA project relies on outdated sources - he published too soon to make use of the VENONA decrypts that NSA began releasing in 1995.

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he manages to recount the 1967 Arab-Israeli War without mentioning the *Liberty* incident. These, however, are pretty minor transgressions.

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[Redacted] He correctly fingers analysis, rather than collection, as the culprit in most of the infamous intelligence misassessments. The failure to believe (especially important in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1973 Yom Kippur War) damaged intelligence assessments far more often than other factors. As for Pearl Harbor, he correctly cites the breakdown of both analysis and communications, rather than the supposed conspiracy to hide the facts put forth by some of the more extreme elements of the historical profession.

(U) So, would it be worth your while to blow \$30 on this book? Actually, it might be. There are some good books on the market covering many of the topics that Richelson writes about, but very little that tries to match his scope. While his treatment is broad (a mile wide and an inch deep, so to speak), it would be difficult to find anything that matches his overall perspective. So sell the weed whacker at a yard sale and put this book on your shelf.

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