

BOOK REVIEWS

Jeffreys-Jones, Rhodri. *The CIA and American Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

Johnson, Loch K. *America's Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

The so-called "Iran-Contra Affair" has put the issue of reforming the Central Intelligence Agency once more at the center of the American political stage. Much that we hear today is reminiscent of the middle 1970s when the disclosures of the Church and Pike Committees had resulted in a surge of criticism of the Agency's performance. Now as then, would-be reformers attack the CIA for being too secret, for operating too frequently and too far beyond the direction of its political masters, for being too subservient to its political masters, for infringing on the civil liberties of Americans, and, most generally and ominously, for operating in ways incompatible with "the norms of a democratic society."

In the 1970s a number of sweeping reforms were proposed, including a comprehensive "intelligence charter" which would have established, among other things, a legislative veto (similar to that contained in 1973 War Powers Resolution) for paramilitary covert operations. As the sensationalisms of 1975 and 1976 faded into memory, however, political energy drained away from the more sweeping proposals. What was ultimately put in place represented pragmatic compromises — the creation of the permanent intelligence committees by both houses of Congress, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (which provided for judicial authorization of electronic surveillance for foreign intelligence purposes), and the Intelligence Accountability Act of 1980 (with its requirement that the President sign a specific finding for each covert initiative taken and that there be notification of such action to the intelligence committees in a "timely fashion").

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and the electoral rebuffs dealt to some of the more visible congressional critics of the intelligence community (such as Frank Church, Burch Bayh, and Walter Mondale), were generally regarded as having ended the "season on inquiry" with respect to American intelligence activities, signalling that reform had gone far enough — perhaps too far. The intelligence agenda of the Reagan administration was not concerned so much with "abuses" as with performance. Many of the Reaganaughts thought that the intelligence community was not only demoralized but intimidated by Congress in performing its assigned role in support of the President. In William Casey's memorable phrase, what he found at the CIA "was not a rogue elephant but a dead elephant." In place of what had become almost ritual deprecation, attention in the early 1980s focused on such questions as the extent to which the CIA had lost the trust of foreign intelligence services because it could not keep secrets, and the extent to which the clandestine service had been decimated by President Carter's DCI, Stansfield Turner and his immediate predecessors.

President Reagan issued a new executive order replacing Carter's guidelines for the intelligence community; in June 1982 legislation was signed into law protecting the identities of American intelligence officers serving undercover, and in October 1984 the Freedom of Information Act was amended to provide modestly greater protection for intelligence materials.

Now all has changed again, and legislation to provide stricter congressional oversight of the CIA simmers on the congressional stove. This adds to the timeliness of these two books, both of which address the question of what kind of a CIA is compatible with American democracy.

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones is an historian at the University of Edinburgh, one of the small band now specializing in the history of espionage. He has given us a general history of the Central Intelligence Agency. The book is not without virtue (it is clearer and more careful than John Ranelagh's *The Agency*), but the dangers that beset general histories are legion. Not all are avoided here. The breakneck pace means that judgments have to be offered in a rather off-hand fashion. Most readers will know something of the events and issues discussed here. On some of these there is a rather large literature, but most are controversial. The problem is not that the author is judgmental, but is that it is very difficult to be *general* and judgmental. A reader who is prepared to be disagreed with where there is a full discussion of the issue will be less tolerant where the issue is treated in a few paragraphs and the judgment is not clearly supported by full discussion.

An example of this is Jeffreys-Jones treatment of the "B-Team" episode. The core of the B-Team's argument was that the Soviet Union attempted to steal a strategic march on the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and that the CIA analysts missed the significance of what was happening. Now Jeffreys-Jones, as they would say at his University, considers this charge "unproved." Fair enough, but not from the discussion presented in the few pages and sparse notes here.

Furthermore, there are troubling matters of nuance. Jeffreys-Jones seems to think that the proponents of the B-Team believed that the official estimates had been in error because of a "liberal bias" on the part of the CIA estimators. In fact, the reason usually advanced by defenders of the B-Team to explain the mistake (if there was a mistake) was not "liberalism" but mirror imaging. That is, that the official estimators of the late 60s and early 70s were powerfully moved toward the conclusion that since the United States had decided mutual assured destruction was the only rational national policy for a superpower to pursue, that the Soviet leadership, obviously composed of rational men, could only conclude the same.

Sometimes highly controversial judgments are delivered almost as throw-away lines. Thus Jeffreys-Jones tells us that "the Soviets argued that the CIA instigated the cold war" and adds "and there may be a particle of truth in this." (p. 43) What the particle might be is never disclosed. Similarly, at the end of the book, we are told that one of the most salient features of modern American democracy and one that has impacted adversely on the CIA's performance is its

“virulent antisocialism.” (p. 247) Yet the book lays no foundation for such a judgment.

There are many trenchant observations offered here; for instance, on the deleterious consequences of the CIA-FBI division of responsibility for counter-intelligence operations. Yet the principle conclusion of the book, that preoccupation with covert operations undermined the CIA’s credibility as an intelligence provider, and that this undermining was furthered by persistent “conservative” attacks on the Agency as liberal and soft on communism, is unpersuasive.

Loch Johnson’s book also considers the relationship between the CIA and democracy, but its assault on the Agency is more slashing and direct than Jeffreys-Jones. Johnson’s interest in intelligence matters began as a staffer on the Church Committee, and he continues to trade heavily in the rhetoric of disclosure and scandal that characterized the “Year of Intelligence.”

The book is divided into four sections. The first deals with “the intelligence mission”; the second with “problems of strategic intelligence”; the third with “the CIA and the rights of Americans”; and the final part deals with “intelligence in a democratic framework.”

The three short chapters on the intelligence mission are useful in providing historical background, including a thumbnail map of the Agency. And the chapters on strategic intelligence are the most satisfying of the book. Johnson charges the CIA with indiscriminate collection of information, indiscriminate use of covert action, inadequate cover abroad, and improper use of intelligence within the United States. Because he is not committed to general history, Johnson can treat the matters he chooses to address in greater detail than Jeffreys-Jones. Therefore his criticisms have a deeper bite.

Section three, dealing with the CIA and civil liberties, is less successful. One chapter is a rehash of the story of the “Huston Plan,” with a rather contrived parallel suggested between Tom Charles Huston and Oliver North. (North has been charged with many things, and convicted of a few, but as far as this reviewer knows no one has accused him of violating the civil liberties of Americans — nor, in fact, did Huston do that, although he certainly proposed to.) This is followed by chapters on CIA relationships with academics and journalists. Both are full of dire foreboding, but the stories, once again, are familiar and fail to justify the breathlessness of the prose. For instance, the flap over some CIA support of certain work by Harvard political scientists Nadav Safran and Samuel P. Huntington is recalled, and Johnson quotes with approval Representative Don Edwards’ comment that “They’re [the CIA] not supposed to operate within the United States, and as far as I’m concerned, this is operating within the United States.” Now both Professor Johnson and Representative Edwards know that the CIA charter (part of the National Security Act of 1947) prohibits domestic *law enforcement* activity by the Agency, not domestic operations. (After all, are we to move the Langley headquarters offshore?) Perhaps undisclosed CIA support for academic research and writing is a bad idea, as some think. Or perhaps required disclosure is a violation of academic freedom, as others think.

But what does not help at all is archly expressed but essentially unargued reproof.

It is, however, the final section of Johnson's book which is most problematical. This is not because he favors further congressional controls over the CIA (notably the Intelligence Oversight Bill introduced in 1988 by Senators William S. Cohen and David Boren), but because his acceptance of the congressional "case" against the CIA is uncritical.

Johnson is not sufficiently sensitive to the *institutional* dimension of the struggle between executive and legislative branches over the CIA. Nor does he consider how divided government has exacerbated the separation of power struggle between legislative and executive branches in our time. Not only do we have a built-in institutional tension which the founders anticipated; we now have a situation where, for the foreseeable future, it seems that the legislative branch is the property of the left of the American political spectrum and the executive branch is the property of the right. Thus we have *policy* and *partisan* divisions that "cumulate" along the lines of institutional separation. Surely it is this that gives to contemporary separation of powers politics its particular intensity, and has more than a little to do with the congressional assault on the CIA. As Johnson knows, the FBI was a worse offender against the "rights of Americans" than the CIA; yet the intensity of congressional concern over the Agency is greater. This is because the CIA is an important foreign policy instrument of the president, and, generally speaking, Congress would like a different policy.

I think Johnson would answer that democracy requires that the legislative branch predominate in the making of foreign policy. But this is the heart of the problem with Johnson's analysis, and with so much of recent writing on the tension between secret intelligence and democracy. For, like Jeffreys-Jones, Johnson offers no explanation of what is meant by "democratic."

At first blush this objection may appear pedantry — of course *everybody knows* what is meant by "democracy." Nothing could be further from the truth. More ambiguity and variation of meaning surround this term than any other in the contemporary political lexicon. Once one gets past core matters of periodic elections and majority rule, models of democracy come in all shapes and sizes. Some stress participation, some deference and leadership; some stress the importance of equality, others of liberty. Different expectations with respect to voting, the proper scope of free speech, and the balance between executive and legislative spheres abound *within* democratic theory. We should understand that none is canonical — none deserves the definite article as in "the requirements of democracy" or "the norms of democratic politics."

Thus, there is no *a priori* basis for Johnson's identification of the congressional "cause" in the American separation of powers struggles as worthier than that of the executive branch. A case for that position would have to be made, brick by brick, through an examination of American constitutional and political history. In fact, both Johnson and Jeffreys-Jones operate on the basis of *implicit*

visions or theories of democracy and its requirements. Perhaps these implicit theories can be reconciled with the traditional American model, but that is a job of intellectual work neither author attempts.

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Clodfelter, Mark. *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam*. New York: The Free Press, 1989.

Among American military men, a remarkable resiliency clings to the belief that the United States did possess a way to achieve its objectives in the Vietnam War, to make the war an American success. If only the United States Air Force had been permitted to bomb the Democratic Republic of Vietnam — the North — earlier in the war on the scale and with the intensity of the LINEBACKER I and LINEBACKER II offensives of 10 May-23 October and 18-29 December 1972, then, the belief goes, the North Vietnamese would have been shocked into yielding to American terms. But the excessive gradualness of the development of American bombing of the North permitted the enemy to harden his defenses and, more important, his resolve. The present reviewer has seen Air Force officers whom he generally admires and respects abandon reason for zeal when presented with this proposition.

In the book at hand, Mark Clodfelter begins (p. ix) by citing President Richard M. Nixon's embracing of this very claim, and Clodfelter returns to the idea repeatedly. Near the end he reminds us again of its persistence, and of its continuing influence upon the conduct of the US Air Force: "Because most air chiefs think political limitations prevented air power from gaining a victory in Vietnam, they have not revamped the fundamentals of strategic bombing doctrine." (p. 208)

But while Major Clodfelter is himself an associate professor of history at the United States Air Force Academy, a principal part of his purpose is to refute the proposition that air power could have won the Vietnam War. His larger purpose, furthermore, is the one implied by his main title: to analyze critically the limits of air power, lest erroneous beliefs about what air power might have accomplished in Vietnam should spawn graver errors in the conduct of future policy and war.

The resiliency of optimistic belief about what air power might have done owes much to the depth of its roots in US Air Force doctrine. Before reaching the Vietnam War, Clodfelter explores the whole evolution of American thinking about strategic air power, from World War I through the 1920s and 1930s and especially through World War II and the Korean War. In the process he offers the best concise history of this body of thought and doctrine currently available. He emphasizes its imperviousness to modification by contrary experience, and its severe limitations even in circumstances much more favorable to applying