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Richard J. Aldrich, Rory Cormac and Michael S. Goodman, *Spying on the World: The Declassified Documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). Pp.456. £29.99. Pb. ISBN 978-0-748-67857-0.

If the walls of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) could talk they would be in an unparalleled position to shed light on the most important defence and foreign policy decisions taken in the United Kingdom over the past 77 years: from the events leading to Second World War to the controversy of the civil war in Syria. Where these walls cannot talk we have the luxury of *Spying on the World: The Declassified Documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013* by Richard J. Aldrich, Rory Cormac and Michael S. Goodman.

*Spying on the World* draws upon a range of declassified papers from the JIC, which are now stored in the National Archives, covering the period from the Second World War until the 1980s. For the period from the mid-1980s until 2013 *Spying on the World* makes use of a range of other sources to inform the reader of the role, function and influence of the JIC. The provision of this breadth of primary material in one authoritative volume is worthy of the cover price alone, particularly given that many of these records have not been digitised in the National Archives and can therefore be difficult to obtain via other means.

Aldrich, Cormac and Goodman have judiciously trawled the archives and other sources of evidence to present 20 case studies that explore the role of the JIC in almost every major defence and foreign policy decision taken by the British Government since the Second World War. These case studies form the basis of each chapter, with examples including ‘The Berlin Blockade’ (chapter seven) or ‘The Falkland’s War’ (chapter 17). Each chapter, in turn, is usefully presented in a standard format: beginning with an account that situates the JIC in relation to the event in question, before presenting the selected archival record for the reader to consider. The archival reports are fascinating in themselves. One need not be a dedicated student of Cold War history, for example, to be intrigued by the JIC paper supplied to the War Cabinet in the dying days of the Second World War that provided the British understanding of Russia’s strategic interests and intentions (chapter 5). The scholarly value of this primary material is supplemented by the provision of a compelling narrative that traces the role of the JIC across time: from ‘limited impact and aloofness’ in its pre-Second World War state (p.31) to ‘direct access to policymaking at the highest level’ (p.419) in relation to Syria in 2013. Aldrich, Cormac and Goodman do well to recognise, however, that this journey to influence was not linear. Even in recent times, under the Prime Ministerships of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, the JIC became marginalised (p.410); before returning to relevance, albeit under a reconfigured intelligence and security apparatus, under David Cameron (p.413).

The authors also do not shy from dispensing criticism of the effectiveness of the JIC where it is merited. This critical analysis is particularly strong on the JIC’s susceptibility to the cognitive trap of mirror-imaging, or projecting ‘British’ values and assumptions onto the decision-making faculties of enemies or intelligence targets. This was perhaps most clearly evident in the JIC’s persistent assessment that the Soviet Union would be unlikely to invade Czechoslovakia due to the constraints of world opinion on the Soviet leadership (chapter 14). The detailed response of the JIC to the Soviet invasion, in an intelligence report titled ‘The Soviet Grip on Eastern Europe’, makes for gripping reading. The authors also describe the JIC as ‘slow to learn lessons’ (p.4), for example in repeating its previous intelligence failures by misreading Argentinean intentions in the lead up to the Falklands Conflict. This latter example, of the Falklands War, is of particular concern given the clear influence of the JIC

paper at the time upon in policy circles and amongst ministers. The JIC paper on the Falklands situation in advance of the war did not consider extreme Argentine reaction to be imminent (p.372). The analysis here also highlights how the Falklands War exposed the JIC's over-reliance on secret intelligence and 'emphasised the importance of a genuinely all-source intelligence assessment machine' (p.374). The overall tone of the narrative accompanying each case study is critical but balanced.

The final chapter of this important book is intelligently given to a consideration of the methodological limitations of an overreliance on declassified JIC documents placed in the National Archives. Aldrich, Cormac and Goodman reflexively account for the potential for any such overreliance to create a 'false narrative' wherein the JIC can appear as cumbersome, passive and internationally isolated (p.426). The JIC's global role, for example, remains obscured in the archival record by the removal of references to connections with the intelligence apparatus of other countries and the destruction and unavailability of many papers. What remains in the National Archive relating to overseas JIC files is 'notably fragmented' and creates a 'distorted narrative' of the JIC as a global actor. The authors also consider the archival record to present an approach to the tasking, drafting and dissemination of JIC intelligence assessments that is unrealistically linear, and does not reflect the 'messier' reality of the tumult and tensions of sub-JIC drafting processes.

*Spying on the World* is a comprehensive and compelling volume that should be on the bookshelf anyone with an interest in Britain's intelligence and security apparatus. There are, however, some very minor omissions in the volume. For example, the authors could have noted the role of the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) in the introductory discussion that locates the JIC within and the wider intelligence community. Some comment on both the division of labour between the JIC and JTAC, and the extent of their cooperation on terrorism-related matters, would have been beneficial to these introductory remarks. There is also here, perhaps, a tendency here to downplay the capacity and capability of the individual intelligence agencies to analyse intelligence 'in-house', rather than relying on Defence Intelligence to undertake this role. Nevertheless, these are quite insignificant quibbles. Aldrich, Cormac and Goodman have collected an impressive array of primary evidence and complemented these with an authoritative analysis befitting of the subject matter.

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