

2015

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Essay No. 125

An H-Diplo Review Essay

h-diplo.org/essays/

H-Diplo Essay Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

H-Diplo Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Published on 27 February 2015

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones. *In Spies We Trust. The Story of Western Intelligence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. ix + 256pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-199-58097-2 (hardcover, \$29.95).

URL: <http://tiny.cc/E125>

Essay by **Damien Van Puyvelde**, The University of Texas at El Paso

In his latest book, renowned historian of the United States and intelligence scholar Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones tells the story of the Anglo-American ‘special intelligence’ relationship. The book offers a comprehensive overview of this widely studied case of intelligence liaison and presents a clear argument: this relationship is not so ‘special’ anymore, and the British services should further a transnational intelligence partnership at the European level.¹ *In Spies We Trust* is informative, thought-provoking, and well written.

¹ David Stafford, *Camp X: OSS, Intrepid and the Allies' North American Training Camp for Secret Agents, 1941-1945* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1987); Jeffrey T. Richelson and Desmond Ball, *The Ties That Bind: Intelligence Cooperation Between the UKUSA Countries--the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australian and New Zealand* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Bradley F. Smith, *The Ultra Magic Deals: The Codebreaker's War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1994); Richard Aldrich, “British Intelligence and the Anglo-American ‘Special Relationship’ during the Cold War,” *Review of International Studies* 24/3 (1998): 331-351; David Stafford and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (eds.), “Special Issue on American-British-Canadian Intelligence Relations 1939-2000,” *Intelligence and National Security* 15/2 (2000) *passim*; Jay Jakub, *Spies and Saboteurs: Anglo-American Collaboration and Rivalry in Human Intelligence Collection and Special Operations, 1940-45* (New York: St. Martin’s 1999); Paul Maddrell, “British-American Scientific Intelligence Collaboration during the Occupation of Germany,” *Intelligence and National Security* 15/2 (2000): 74-94; Richard Aldrich, “Transatlantic intelligence and security cooperation,” *International Affairs* 80/4 (2004) 731-753; idem, *The Hidden Hand. Britain, America, and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London: Duckworth, 2006); Michael Goodman, *Spying on the Nuclear Bear: Anglo-American Intelligence and the Soviet Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Richard Aldrich, “US-European Intelligence Co-operation on Counter-Terrorism: Low Politics and Compulsion,” *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 11/1 (2009): 122-139; David Gioe, “Handling HEOR: joint Anglo-American tradecraft in the case of Oleg Penkovsky,” in *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis, A 50-year retrospective*, edited by David Gioe, Len Scott and Christopher Andrew (London: Routledge, 2014): 135-175.

The structure of the book supports the central argument. The author examines the origins, rise and decline of the 'special' relationship between the British and American intelligence communities throughout the twentieth century. Jeffreys-Jones emphasizes the separate origins of both communities and explains how "assumptions about shared [Anglo-Saxon] values" (26) and a similar "global vision" (35) brought the countries' intelligence officials closer. The Anglo-American intelligence partnership reached its peak during the Second World War, with valuable cooperation in the realm of signal intelligence (SIGINT), and started to decline in the second half of the twentieth century. The Cold War was marked by the expansion of the United States' intelligence community, and a decline of British power which slowly changed the balance between the two partners to the point where American dominance became incontestable. Intelligence scandals, American technological prowess, political and societal shifts, and the revelation of 'new' threats and horizons in the aftermath of the Cold War all convincingly explain the 'decline' of the Anglo-American 'special intelligence' relationship.

For Jeffreys-Jones, European intelligence cooperation has the potential to become the next big intelligence partnership. After taking note of the obstacles to transnational intelligence cooperation, including *raison d'état* and lack of trust, the author provides a valuable contribution to the nascent body of literature on European intelligence thanks to a series of interviews (chapters 10 and 11).² The leap from the Anglo-American 'special relationship' to multilateral cooperation at the European level is contentious. A European arrangement, the author hopes, will be more about intelligence and the less about the "foolish adventurism" that characterized the Anglo-American 'special intelligence' relationship throughout the twentieth century (233). Some readers will certainly disagree with Jeffreys-Jones's apparent support for a more integrated European intelligence capability, but the argument has the merit of triggering a debate that will be of interest to scholars interested in European security.

The Story of Western Intelligence explores various instances of cooperation and competition, agreements and disagreements between the British and American intelligence services. The author pertinently considers the ebb and flow of intelligence liaison in the wider political context of the Anglo-American special relationship, adding an intelligence dimension to the intergovernmental history between the UK and the

² Stéphane Lefebvre, "The Difficulties and Dilemmas of International Intelligence Cooperation," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 16/4 (2003) 530-531; Martin Rudner, "Britain Betwixt and Between: UK SIGINT Alliance Strategy's Transatlantic and European Connections," *Intelligence and National Security* 19/4 (2004) 571-609; Glen M. Segell, "Intelligence Agency Relations Between the European Union and the U.S.," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 17/1 (2004) 81-96; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, "Rise, Fall and Regeneration: From CIA to EU," *Intelligence and National Security* 24/1 (2009) 103-118; Claudia Hillebrand, *Counter-Terrorism Networks in the European Union: Maintaining Democratic Legitimacy After 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

U.S.³ An important point here is that political tensions between the two countries do not necessarily translate at the operational level of the intelligence relationship (140). The book is at its best when it explores the process of mutual learning that occurred between the two intelligence communities. For instance, the Americans learned the trade of intelligence from the British in the early twentieth century (49), and then inspired the British, as well as many other Western countries, to make their intelligence apparatus more transparent and politically accountable (chapter 8). At a time when Western intelligence services are criticized for their widespread intelligence collection programs, it is worth reminding readers that the U.S. once paved the way for the institutionalization of more democratic intelligence agencies.

Trust is one of the central themes explored by Jeffreys-Jones, and although the book was published before the 'Snowden affair,' the *Story of Western Intelligence* resonates at a time of increasing distrust between Western people and their intelligence agencies, and between Western governments as a result of the global surveillance disclosures. Throughout the twentieth century, the American and British intelligence establishments trusted each other's institutions more than those of the French or the Germans. Trust is an essential ingredient of intelligence cooperation and, as a general rule, national intelligence services find it easier to vest their trust in bi-lateral cooperation rather than multilateral arrangements (187). Further European integration in this realm would therefore challenge common wisdom. Since the 1970s, public trust in intelligence has also become an important factor in the story of intelligence. A good balance between secrecy and openness should allow the people to trust their government and the intelligence activities carried out in its name (172). Interestingly, the reasons for which intelligence is trusted seem to have evolved from its use as a tool to win wars to a tool used to deliver peace and security. However, the reasons behind distrust – mostly misuses and abuses of special powers – have remained relatively constant.

Some reviewers have been puzzled by the second part of the book's title and note that the monograph is not a *Story of Western Intelligence* but a story of the Anglo-American 'special intelligence' relationship.⁴ Occasional references to the Canadian, French, German, Israeli, and Scandinavian services help the author to draw comparisons that

³ Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1984).

⁴ John Ehrman and Jason Manosevitz, Review of Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust. The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *Studies in Intelligence* 58/2 (2014), 1, <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-58-no-2/pdfs/Ehrman-Manosevitz-Review-In%20Spies%20We%20Trust.pdf> (accessed December 2, 2014); Bernard Porter, Review of Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust. The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *Lobster Magazine* <http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster66/lob66-spies-we-trust.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2014) 1; Gill Bennett, Review of Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust. The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 25/1 (2014) 173.

situate the British-American liaison. According to Jeffreys-Jones, the focus on European intelligence at the end of the book also explains the use of the term ‘Western Intelligence.’⁵ Two CIA analysts, John Ehrman and Jason Manosevitz, find it odd that *The Story of Western Intelligence* does not discuss more extensively the role of the Five Eyes partnership between the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.⁶ The value of such a generalizing term as “Western intelligence” is also questionable from a descriptive point of view. American, British, Canadian, French, German, Israeli, and Scandinavian services all have different political and intelligence cultures, even though they share some commonalities. In his review of the book, Timothy Sayle interestingly suggests that the term “Western intelligence” could actually reflect the transnational way in which intelligence officers came to think of themselves across the Atlantic.⁷

Jeffreys-Jones skillfully uses primary and secondary sources to tell the story of some of the characters behind *Western Intelligence*. One of the recurring themes is the role played by the Anglo-American elite, mostly Ivy League and Oxbridge graduates, behind the development of intelligence in both countries. For Jeffreys-Jones, this elite is losing its hold over intelligence, since the American and British national security establishments have sought to adopt a more diverse workforce in the twenty-first century. As a result of this new diversity, the British and American intelligence services may increasingly look and act differently. Experts may disagree with this conclusion; they may also disagree with the depiction of specific events and the explanations provided by Jeffreys-Jones. However, on the whole, the book is informative, and thoughtful, and the author’s positions clearly contribute to a host of scholarly debates in the fields of intelligence studies, transatlantic history, and even European security. While the Anglo-American ‘special intelligence’ relationship increasingly appears to be less exclusive, its long history continues to make it special and worthy of interest.

Damien Van Puyvelde is Assistant Professor of Security Studies at the National Security Studies Institute (NSSI), The University of Texas at El Paso. His main research interests are in the fields of intelligence and security studies. Dr. Van Puyvelde has published articles in academic journals such as *Democracy and Security*, *Intelligence and National Security*, *La Revue internationale et stratégique*, and *Sécurité et stratégie*, and opinion pieces in *The Conversation* and *The National Interest*. He is currently working on a book titled *The U.S. Intelligence Community and the Private Sector*.

⁵ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, email correspondence with the author, 19 November 2014.

⁶ Ehrman and Manosevitz, 1.

⁷ A point suggested in: Timothy Sayle, Review of Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust. The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman, eds., *Learning from the Secret Past: Cases in British Intelligence History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), *Intelligence and National Security* (2014) 1, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/02684527.2014.947697> (accessed December 2, 2014).

© 2015 The Author.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)