



Cloak and Dollar: A History of American Secret Intelligence

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones

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A history of American secret intelligence from the founding of the nation to the present day. Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones chronicles the extraordinary expansion of American secret intelligence from the 1790s, when George Washington set aside a discretionary fund for covert operations, to the beginning of the 21st century, when United States intelligence expenditure exceeds Russia's total defence budget. How did the American intelligence system evolve into such an enormous and costly bureaucracy? Jeffreys-Jones argues that hyperbolic claims and the impulse toward self-promotion have beset American intelligence organizations almost from the outset. Allan Pinkerton, whose 19th-century detective agency was the forerunner of modern intelligence bureaux, invented assassination plots and fomented anti-radical fears in order to demonstrate his own usefulness. Subsequent spymasters likewise invented or exaggerated a succession of menaces ranging from white slavery to Soviet espionage to digital encryption in order to build their intelligence agencies and, later, to defend their ever-expanding budgets. While American intelligence agencies have achieved some notable successes, Jeffreys-Jones argues, the intelligence community as a whole has suffered from a dangerous distortion of mission. By exaggerating threats such as Communist infiltration and Chinese espionage at the expense of other, more intractable problems - such as the narcotics trade and the danger of terrorist attack - intelligence agencies have misdirected resources and undermined their own objectivity. Since the end of the Cold War, the aims of American secret intelligence have been unclear. Recent events have raised serious questions about effectiveness of foreign intelligence, and yet the CIA and other intelligence agencies are poised for even greater expansion under the current administration. Offering an assessment of the origins and evolution of American secret intelligence, Jeffreys-Jones asks us to think also about the future direction of American intelligence agencies.

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