

Spies: The Epic Intelligence War Between East and West

Calder Walton

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To political and International Relations (IR) theorists, the significance of Calder Walton's *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War Between East and West* lies not only in its relevance to the "New Cold War" (pp. 488–515) dynamics but also for IR theorisation. Before touching upon the IR theory aspect, here is a brief account of what this book does: it looks back, contextualises, understands, works on all three levels of IR analysis (leaders, state, system), and Walton—an award-winning intelligence historian and English-qualified barrister—peers into what may lie ahead. The book is combined classical geopolitical analysis and applied great man theory ("leaders matter", p. 17) at the level of everything clandestine ranging from stealing secrets, through subversion, to sabotage. Rooted in a data mix of archival records in Britain, the United States and the former Soviet Union, private papers, memoirs, and oral interviews, *Spies* develops three arguments.

First, the Cold War between the two supercharged empires emerging out of the Great War is not something easily squeezed into the late 1940s to 1991 timeframe. *Spies* shows that through creating Cheka in 1917—predecessor to the KGB—with both a domestic and foreign mandate to hunt down enemies of the Bolshevik Revolution, it was Vladimir Lenin who did start what was to become an "epic" intelligence war between East and West (pp. 28–52). This makes for a tragic re-read of world history because as much as London and Washington were successfully allying with Moscow against Nazi Germany during the Second World War, they did not fully realize until after 1945 the scope and depth of Stalin's secret intelligence work raging against them since the 1920s.

Second, contrary to equally widespread political and IR thinking in the West, the Cold War—and intelligence war—did not end when the Soviet Union collapsed. There was a great deal of naivety on behalf of the West, again. Vladimir Putin may have been a low-level KGB officer of humble background, but when climbing up the political ladder he surrounded himself with *siloviki*, i.e., securocrats coming out of the military and intelligence services. What *Spies* does is link Putin all the way back to where and how it all began: not to his birthplace Saint Petersburg, but to the Lubyanka in Moscow, a former Russian insurance building that Lenin's *chekists* had requisitioned as headquarters and torture chamber (pp. 445–87). What Walton explains vividly is why the KGB style security and foreign politics under Putin is not particularly novel: a fair amount of paranoia and existential angst have been the stuff out of which Russia's strategic behaviour is made and re-made since the chaotic days of Lenin's revolutionaries (p. 449). Hence, the notion of a hundred-year intelligence war between Russia and the West.

And third, according to Walton's explorative analysis of that covert intelligence battle, in today's post-Ukraine era, as *Spies* concludes, Britain and America (and Europe) are "at approximately the year 1947" in that the "full scale of the Chinese onslaught on the West is only now being appreciated" (p. 506). While this reviewer disagrees with the emerging consensus that the future of intelligence work is open-source information (pp. 509–10), the book makes a powerful case that in the face of truly unprecedented amounts of intelligence operations coming out of Beijing's Ministry of State Security, it looks as if the

West is in for another hundred-year intelligence struggle, and all that in the age of AI and information warfare, and against both Russia and China. *Spies* is thought-provoking, and timely.

However, it also speaks to the question of IR theorisation of intelligence. *Spies* is a pointed and well-researched reminder that whether we like it or not, the ancient game of spying and other shady means of statecraft are (in this reviewer's language) institutionalised practices in international society. And yet, intelligence theorisation has been absent in IR for almost as long as the hundred-year intelligence war itself. Hans J. Morgenthau was critical of CIA work. John H. Herz did serve in the Office of Strategic Services, predecessor to the CIA, in the 1940s, but offers us only autobiographical gossiping about it. And even the late Robert Jervis does not fit the bill. His pathbreaking intelligence work got absorbed into the epistemic orbit of transdisciplinary intelligence studies; it's as if Jervis were wearing two hats: one in IR, and the other in intelligence studies. Put bluntly, intelligence is IR theory's no-man's land. Neorealists work on the structural international systems level. To liberal institutionalists and regime theorists, constructivists, and critical IR theorists, intelligence is little more than *raison d'état* on steroids. In that regard, Walton's fascinating book challenges us in political studies and IR theory to re-think intelligence's place in the theoretical study of foreign policy and international affairs.