



LITERATURE REVIEW

John A. Gentry, *Neutering the CIA: Why US Intelligence Versus Trump Has Long-Term Consequences* (Estes Park, Colorado: Armin Lear Press Inc., 2023), 478 pp.

The U.S. “intelligence community” (IC) is less a homogeneous “community” than a collection of multiple diverse agencies and offices throughout the U.S. government and military, each with its own history and distinct culture. Though often considered to be non-partisan in its approach, various components of the IC have come under scrutiny from various quarters for playing to perceived partisan biases and agendas. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is one such organization that has repeatedly been accused of playing politics with national security by favoring the particular political proclivities of certain presidents and skewing analyses to support the preferred policies of this or that administration.

In his book, *Neutering the CIA: Why US Intelligence Versus Trump Has Long-Term Consequences*, former CIA analyst John Gentry dissects the culture and political biases of the CIA to argue that the agency—including its senior leadership—allowed a general and widely-held dislike of President Trump to color its analyses and assessments, all to the detriment of U.S. national security.

Much of the book recounts Gentry’s own personal experiences while at CIA and the experiences of others within that organization and elsewhere in the intelligence community. Some readers may be offput by the author’s recounting of information received in private correspondence from unnamed sources. Even so, there is much here to generate concern. Noting that he “personally experienced a variant of the ‘politicization’ of intelligence,” which he observes is traditionally defined as “the injection of political or ideological perspectives into intelligence analyses in order to advance personal, political, or organizational goals” (p. I), Gentry argues that politicization of the IC reached new heights during the Trump Administration and “potentially has much greater ramifications for the IC and the United States as a whole” than what he experienced in the 1980s (p. V).

Of course, the charge of politicizing intelligence is not new. One of the most significant examples occurred during the Clinton Administration when the CIA sent a letter to Senate Democrats citing key judgments from a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 95-19) that were then publicized to defend President Clinton’s opposition to the missile defense policies congressional Republicans sought to mandate in the annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Clinton’s opposition led him to veto the “must-pass” bill, leaving angry Republicans to charge that intelligence had been politicized to support the administration’s preferred policy. Several subsequent investigations, including by the “Rumsfeld Commission” and the General Accounting Office (now the Government Accountability Office, GAO), determined that the NIE was severely and methodologically flawed. A panel headed by former Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates (who also served as President Obama’s Secretary of Defense) was set up to consider the politicization charge. The Gates panel also concluded that the NIE’s analysis was faulty, but that the assertion that it was politicized to support a particular policy outcome was unfounded. Nevertheless, in the context of a highly partisan debate over missile defense policy, the perception of



politicization of intelligence lingered.¹ While this specific example is not addressed in the book, there are numerous other more recent examples that are documented, including the apparently false accusations of Trump collusion with Russia over the 2016 election and the administration's reaction to the coronavirus pandemic.

Gentry is especially critical of some of the policies enacted by Directors of National Intelligence (DNIs) and the CIA during the Clinton and Obama years, noting that they reflected an effort to push social agendas such as the "diversity and inclusion" movement. He is particularly critical of former DNI James Clapper, who after leaving government service became a commentator on CNN where he "regularly criticized President Trump on a wide variety of issues, including many non-intelligence topics" (p. 147). Leon Panetta, John Brennan, and others, Gentry argues, sought to dictate social and preferential hiring policies that some within the IC saw as "controversial and divisive." He notes that both Clapper and Brennan "changed policies, structures, and incentives in ways designed to change CIA's organizational culture in ways that would be both politically significant and enduring" (p. 149). He recounts Brennan's acknowledgement that in the 1976 presidential election Brennan actually voted for Gus Hall, the candidate of the Communist Party of the USA, and, according to Gentry, "advocated political activism repeatedly to employee groups, with evidently considerable success" (p. 151). Gentry notes the lack of empirical data to back up the claim that "demographic diversity" improved the performance of the IC, while noting that the Soviet leadership considered this "America's greatest political vulnerability" (p. 193).

Gentry's criticism of the social engineering policies of the IC under Democratic administrations should not be mistaken as a full-throated endorsement of Donald Trump. Indeed, he notes that many of Trump's claims before and after being elected president were "factually incorrect" (p. 201). Trump's language and "polarizing rhetoric" were "needlessly abrasive" (pp. 226, 231) and angered many IC professionals, who perceived his attitude to be an "assault on intelligence" (p. 207), and Trump's initial rejection of the IC's conclusion that Russia sought to interfere in the 2016 election sparked intense distrust. Gentry acknowledges that Trump said "many disparaging and incorrect things about the intelligence community" (p. 213); yet he explains that Trump's apparent aversion to daily intelligence briefings was not unique among U.S. presidents, noting, for example, that former Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey resigned "because he could not get time on [President] Clinton's calendar" (p. 220). Indeed, after Trump appointed Mike Pompeo to be his Director of the CIA, Pompeo was added as a member of the president's Cabinet and the "Principal's Committee"—only the second time a CIA director had been elevated to such a stature.

Nevertheless, Gentry argues that the reaction to Trump by intelligence professionals "amounted to a new and important form of overt politicization" (p. 232). He contends,

¹ As then-Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ) stated at the time, "the conclusion that flowed from the faulty assumptions of the CIA National Intelligence Estimate had the effect of allowing unwarranted political conclusions to be reached and preached.... Because of the CIA's letter to Senators at the time that we were debating the national missile defense amendment, policy was affected." See *Congressional Record*, July 31, 1998, p. S9522, available at https://irp.fas.org/congress/1998_cr/s980731-rumsfeld.htm.

“Negative reactions to Trump by professional intelligence officers, current and former... were so unusual by historical standards and because they dwarfed the pro-Trump commentary” (p. 232). Gentry criticizes former Deputy CIA Director Michael Morell for publishing an article in 2016 alleging that “Mr. Putin had recruited Mr. Trump as an unwitting agent of the Russian Federation” by noting that Morell “broke a long-standing taboo by invoking his intelligence credentials to rationalize a domestic, partisan political action—a vote for [Hillary] Clinton” (pp. 234-235). Brennan is also criticized for his “emotional” and “outlandish” anti-Trump comments. The leaking to the press of negative information by intelligence professionals in opposition to presidential policies is not unprecedented, but Gentry argues the anti-Trump leaks were “more numerous and longer-lasting than ever before” (p. 234).

Neutering the CIA documents chronologically the scope and extent of the extensive criticism of Candidate, then President Trump, by current and former CIA officials. Gentry contends that the anti-Trump attacks by Brennan, Clapper, and Michael Hayden—another former Director of the CIA—stood in sharp contrast to the traditionally apolitical postures of intelligence leaders. The book also acknowledges that while some intelligence professionals saw it as their moral duty to leak information or speak out vigorously, others believed that doing so would bolster concerns over politicized intelligence and ultimately harm the credibility of the IC.

Gentry also discusses whether a “Deep State” exists within the intelligence community and whether “politicization by omission” occurs. He concludes that “Politicization of intelligence, however generated, damages the credibility, the perceived trustworthiness, and thereby the value of US intelligence” (p. 389). With respect to the debate over whether it is appropriate to speak out publicly or to remain silent, he compares and contrasts the standards of conduct used by the IC with those of the military, arguing for a “national debate about ‘civil-intelligence relations’” (p. 408).

No doubt some readers of *Neutering the CIA* will see it as a partisan defense of Trump and an attempt inappropriately to sully the reputations of intelligence community analysts and leaders who were highly critical of the nation’s 45th president. Yet this conclusion is unsupported by the numerous criticisms of Donald Trump leveled by Gentry throughout the pages of this book; Gentry makes clear that many of Trump’s statements were wrong, polarizing, mercurial, and inconsistent regarding intelligence. However, whatever one thinks of Trump’s style and language, Gentry asserts “The most critical asset that intelligence has in its relationship with senior leaders is its credibility,” which he argues is something the IC lost as a result of its vociferous anti-Trump posturing.

Prophetically, he argues that the “Trump-IC conflict [is] the first of a series of ideology-based struggles” that “we will see again” (p. VII). He notes that “the preponderance of evidence points strongly to the continued existence of a politicized IC that will cause problems for years to come—long after Trump has left the political scene” (p. 414). He calls for significant reforms of the intelligence community, including investigating “the state of political activism” within the IC and “the extent to which analytic products are being politicized, with what slant” (p. 423). He also states that the IC must do better in combatting

leaks, suggesting the increased use of polygraphs. More radical structural changes may be needed, he argues, though he acknowledges there are downsides to such an approach.

These and other recommendations may be viewed by some readers as ideologically motivated, and Gentry's conclusion that at least some of the IC's work is ideologically partisan may be challenged by others, but the information in *Neutering the CIA* definitely provides important food for thought rarely presented publicly.

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John D. Maurer, *Competitive Arms Control: Nixon, Kissinger, & SALT 1969-1972* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 312 pp.

In *Competitive Arms Control: Nixon, Kissinger, & SALT 1969-1972*, John D. Maurer introduces the concept of competitive arms control, i.e., arms control crafted to channel great power competition to areas of a state's competitive advantages and away from its disadvantages. To demonstrate the concept, Maurer provides a detailed account of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) negotiations during the Nixon Administration. He argues that SALT negotiations cannot be understood solely as a cooperative endeavor between the United States and the Soviet Union because of the important influence of "arms control competitors," or those who wanted to utilize arms control to obtain an advantage for the United States.

The author's account of interagency arguments between arms control "competitors" (represented by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird) and "cooperators" (represented by the chief U.S. delegate to SALT and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency Director Gerard Smith) during SALT negotiations is as comprehensive as it is competently executed; the author relies on numerous declassified documents as well as interviews and popular accounts of negotiations from direct participants.

Maurer's work improves a general understanding of the arms control process and introduces a useful additional dynamic that so far has been underappreciated in the general discourse on arms control. Yet, students of arms control may find the analysis lacking. Given what transpired during the SALT negotiations and the agreements' implementation, the SALT agreement may be considered an example of how one should *not* conduct competitive arms control negotiations. The author's praise of the SALT process in that context sounds odd. After all, the U.S. negotiations were marked by a deterioration of its negotiating positions and with it, most of the leverage the United States had going in.

The U.S. decision to limit U.S. missile defenses may have been seen as necessary to reach an agreement with the Soviets, but it certainly was not a sound mark of a competitive arms control approach, as the author interprets it. Restrictions imposed by the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty hampered significant *future* advancements in an area of U.S. competitive advantage at the time the treaty was signed without substantive reductions in Soviet

offensive capability—and that is even before one considers the lack of Soviet compliance with arms control agreements in contrast to U.S. adherence to the letter of treaties.

The SALT agreements permitted and codified Soviet offensive force superiority in exchange for future U.S. technological improvements (which in many ways ended up not materializing for a host of separate reasons). They made it harder for the United States to take advantage of its technological superiority--the opposite effect of what should have occurred had the agreement been truly competitive. The author presents the process as a mix of a competitive and cooperative approach; yet, the strategic implications of SALT were a failure from a competitive arms control perspective, and from the perspective of U.S. interests. The discussion of SALT's implementation would provide an important indicator of the degree to which were the cooperative and competitive arms control approaches successful.

At the end of the day, the concept of competitive arms control should include negotiating from a position of strength, coupled with a realistic appreciation of political relations among nations. The fact that the United States let its relative strategic position atrophy during negotiations and then did not give up *all* the advantages it had in the SALT agreements can hardly be considered a mark of competitiveness.

The author's extrapolation to the assessment of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) negotiations is similarly off the mark; the Obama Administration pursued the treaty with the Russian Federation as a cooperative endeavor under the "reset" policy and negotiations resulted in an agreement significantly disadvantageous to the United States. The fact that the United States had to make a majority of treaty accountable nuclear weapon reductions while Russia started below permitted numbers in two of the three treaty-defined categories is a mark of an agreement that is not based on a sound competitive approach. Indeed, the Obama Administration's "reset" policy with Russia precluded serious competitive approaches because the Administration was interested in obtaining an agreement as soon as possible, Russia was no longer considered an adversary, and the potential of conflict with it was considered low. In other words, the Administration did not take time to seriously consider or negotiate competitive arms control approaches.

The concept of competitive arms control warrants further exploration but the examples the author selected for illustrating it are not always appropriate. Despite this broader conceptual problem, the book is an interesting and accessible account of the inter-agency dynamic during SALT negotiations and worth an interested reader's time.

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John H. Maurer and Erik Goldstein, eds., *The Road to Pearl Harbor: Great Power War in Asia and the Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2022), 224 pages.

A growing great power in the Pacific, fueled by nationalism and resentment, threatens Western powers and their allies who are slow to recognize the threat and adjust their military postures. That scenario should sound familiar, and two of the pre-eminent scholars of naval history have edited a concise general history in *The Road to Pearl Harbor* which helps connect the dots between the past and the present. John H. Mauer and Erik Goldstein recognize the parallels between Imperial Japan and today's China are not exact, but as the aphorism goes, "history may not repeat itself, but it does rhyme."

The editors' main purpose in assembling this work is to explain why World War II occurred, with the concluding chapter focusing on present-day China and its military doctrine. Their goal is not to prophesy about an impending war, but rather to shine a light on history "to illuminate the dangers that currently confront American leaders." The editors generally succeed in their stated goal.

Each chapter is between 20 and 30 pages and focuses on a major combatant in the Pacific theater of World War II, and more specifically, on leaders of those states. In the editors' words, "We analyze the menu of foreign policy and strategy choices open to these leaders and explain why the steps they took led to war... we pay close attention to the domestic political and international settings in which they operated. Their internal and external surroundings both provided opportunities for action as well as constrained their policy menu of choice to act creatively." Each chapter's author wisely steers away from speculative history and excessive "what if" questions, and focuses instead on the factors that affected each leaders' decision-making – a range that includes factors as diverse as their earlier responsibilities in government, personal interactions, budget constraints, military advisors, and more.

The chapters are arranged loosely in chronological fashion beginning with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George's efforts at peacemaking, followed by Imperial Japan's naval leadership's protest against and removal of the Washington naval treaties of the 1920s and 1930s. The third chapter focuses on Chiang Kai-shek and his often competing priorities in tamping down a Communist insurgency while battling Imperial Japan's invasion. The fourth and fifth chapters concern, respectively, Winston Churchill's and Franklin Roosevelt's evolving approaches to relations with Japan before World War II. The sixth chapter examines the year 1941 from the perspective of China, Japan, the United States, and Great Britain – helping to highlight some of the immediate causes of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The seventh and final chapter focuses less on contemporary China's leader, Xi Jinping, and more on Chinese military doctrine – specifically its emphasis on crippling an adversary's logistics, preferably through speed and surprise.

The Road to Pearl Harbor will be of greater interest to a general readership since specialists are unlikely to find anything remarkably new in its pages. True to the book's overall purpose, however, each chapter examines some of the most pertinent factors in each leaders' decision-making. In this sense, each chapter is a mini-case study in grand strategy

as state leaders confronted often competing priorities, both foreign and domestic. This dynamic is especially important for general readers to understand since the temptation in studying history is to look back with perfect hindsight and judge a leader's actions, instead of (correctly) examining what they did know when they made their decisions.

The Road to Pearl Harbor is a good book, but what holds it back from being great is a missing concluding chapter. As the reader progresses through the book, especially a reader well-informed on current events, the parallels between then and now are quite glaring in some cases, and more subtle in others. In both cases, however, a concluding chapter that highlighted these parallels (and discontinuities where they exist) would have tied the book together nicely. As it is, the book ends with a sobering examination of China's military doctrine and its forces, but no explicit connection to WWII. Thus, readers are left to answer for themselves what lessons should today's leaders draw from the pre-WWII experience?

When read as a general guide on how and why World War II began in the Pacific theater, *The Road to Pearl Harbor* is a valuable and concise introduction to the lay reader. Although marred by a lack of a summary conclusion, those interested in grand strategy, leadership decision-making, and the causes of war will find it an engaging read.

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