

Book Reviews

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Book Reviews



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***Black Ops: The Rise of Special Forces in the C.I.A., the S.A.S., and Mossad.* By Tony Geraghty. New York, NY: Pegasus Books, LLC, 2010. ISBN 978-1-60598-097-3. Photographs. Notes. Sources cited. Index. Pp. xi, 250. \$28.95**

With the backdrop of President Barack Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan, Tony Geraghty explores the development and utilization of Special Forces (SF) within the United States, British, and Israeli military. Special Forces units are highly trained, small military units designed to conduct secret missions with a relatively small number of personnel. These units typically have very close ties to their nation's intelligence services, such as the Central Intelligence Agency, the Special Air Service, or the Mossad: "The darkest, most sensitive Special Forces operations are linked to official, or quasi-official, intelligence agencies while remaining plausibly deniable," (p. 151). Geraghty looks at their post-World War II origins and their rise during the Cold War. He outlines how Special Forces have given governments flexibility in conducting guerrilla warfare and espionage activities, and have provided support to indigenous opposition forces. Their small footprint allows deniability that conventional military forces do not. Geraghty explains that "modern SF warfare has its origins in the Irish War of Independence, a war the British lost but from which they learned useful lesson" (p. xix). During the Cold War, SF units developed into the nation's elite counterterrorist fighting force and played critical roles in every major and minor conflict in the twentieth century. Geraghty effectively shows how the precision allowed by Special Forces is now being used as part of the U.S. military's strategy in Afghanistan. President Obama in a landmark speech on Afghanistan military strategy said that the military will have to be "nimble and precise" to be effective. Geraghty writes, "For 'nimble and precise' read 'Special Operations Forces'" (p. xlix).

Geraghty utilizes over 240 separate sources and includes three key reports as appendices, including General Stanley McChrystal's *Report on Afghanistan, Afghanistan's Narcotics War*, and a Senate report on the battle of Tora Bora. Throughout the book, Geraghty primarily examines the application of Special Forces in Vietnam and Afghanistan, but he

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touches on several other conflicts, including British activity in Yemen and Oman, the failed rescue attempt of U.S hostages from Tehran dubbed Desert One, and Desert Storm. An example of this is a section dedicated to reviewing the Coalition Military actions in the battle of Tora Bora, Afghanistan. Geraghty describes the evidence of Usama bin Ladin's presence at this battle and the failure to commit enough resources to capture him, stating that "serious efforts to nail bin Laden before he escaped from entrapment in the rabbit warren of Tora Bora, near the Pakistan frontier, mean putting American lives on the line" (p. 119). Geraghty goes on to quote a United States Senate committee report, *Tora Bora Revisited*: "The injection of more U.S. troops and the resulting casualties would have contradicted the risk-adverse 'light footprint' model formulated by Rumsfeld and Franks" (p. 119).

Geraghty makes one departure from a straight historical review of Special Forces by offering up opinions on how the 2003 United States-led invasion of Iraq created a gap in Afghanistan filled by the reconstituted insurgency of the Taliban and al Qaida. "The first strategic error was to switch Special Operations resources from Afghanistan to Iraq," (p. 135). The author draws his conclusion based solely on one source, *An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan* by Gary C. Schroen. While the information may prove to be true, the author does not provide the context on which the decisions were based and gives the perception the withdrawal was solely based on oil.

An explanation of the development of Israeli Special Forces under the Mossad, while interesting, does not enlighten the reader beyond current understanding. Geraghty does expound on the successful actions of the Israeli Special Forces and its critical place in the development of counter-terrorist strategy. While the author masterfully crafts personal stories to explain the make-up of the various forces and their successful and failed missions, he jumps from service-to-service, conflict-to-conflict, decade-to-decade, rapidly throughout the chapter, creating a disconnected feeling for the reader. This is balanced by the fact the author covers over sixty years of history for three different countries and their Special Forces units. While the book does not offer any solutions to the complex situations facing government in a post-9/11 world, and in light of the nature of Special Forces activities being shrouded in secrecy, the author does an excellent job at peering through the curtain to see the back story to events continuing to shape our world today.

Matthew D. Simmons, Special Agent, United States Air Force

***Pakistan: Can the United States Secure an Insecure State?* By C. Christine Fair, Keith Krane, Christopher S. Chivvis, Samir Puri, and Michale Spirtas. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8330-4807-3. Figures. Tables. Notes. Sources Cited. Pp. xxvii, 232. \$35.00.**

The RAND Corporation's latest analysis of U.S.-Pakistani relations is a combined effort that pulls together some of the foremost observers of the topic to address a problem that continues to evade a clearly defined solution. The authors have all traveled to, observed, written about, and offered solutions to Pakistan's security dilemmas. In this monograph, they offer a set of policy recommendations to guide a way forward for Washington and Islamabad. As with all RAND Corporation analyses, the research is meticulous, and the examination of the breadth and scope of the issue at hand is expansive. However, this tome serves more as a solid analysis of what has occurred rather than providing practical solutions of where to go from here. The authors offer solutions, but those ideas are more idealistic than practical or even pragmatic. In this sense, the book is squarely in "center mass" of existing literature with (on the positive side) great value to give the reader a sense of what has occurred, but (on the negative side) little value to point the reader to workable bilateral policy solutions.

In the first part of the book, the authors discuss the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in light of the post-September 11 alliance in the war on terror. Over the last few years, Washington has poured billions of dollars in assistance into Islamabad for military, intelligence, and counterterrorism programs. In spite of this, Pakistan is more insecure, anti-U.S. sentiment has increased, aid to the Taliban has continued (albeit sporadically), and concrete results regarding Pakistani stability and progress in the war on terror have been difficult to measure: Islamabad still teeters on a precarious fulcrum in a perpetual balancing act between civilian and military rule. The authors outline the following factors: Pakistani support for the Taliban continues in spite of threat of U.S. sanctions; Islamabad's nuclear surety is a perennial concern for Washington, which fears with some justification that fissile materials could fall into the wrong hands if civil order disintegrates; domestic instability remains a constant in spite of multiple, massive cash influxes from Washington, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations; and Washington and Islamabad have never seemed so far apart in terms of the mutually exclusive nature of their over-arching strategic goals. It calls to mind the statement of former President Bill Clinton, "insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result."

In spite of repeated admonishments from Washington and the international community, Islamabad continues to foment within its own borders radical Islamic factions. It supports the Taliban (sometimes blatantly, sometimes covertly), provides aid to Kashmiri militants in a thinly-disguised proxy war against India, and inconsistently adheres to international human rights standards. In addition, the country suffers from inadequate health care—even by Third-World standards, high illiteracy, a dysfunctional education system that serves as a breeding ground for militancy and extremism, and chronic political cronyism that mocks any standard of public accountability.

As the authors examine how Pakistan might attempt to mitigate these myriad factors that contribute to the country's insecurity, they correctly observe some of the extant realities Islamabad must confront. Pakistan's irredentist territorial claims to Kashmir have fallen on deaf ears for 63 years, both in New Delhi and in numerous international forums. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the so-called "Durand Line," is more of a concept than a mutually accepted bilateral reality between Islamabad and Kabul. Islamabad, in spite of years of concrete evidence and multiple reports from international organizations, seemingly refuses to acknowledge the internal threat from myriad unchecked militant groups. This is perhaps due to the fact that its security arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), uses these militants to further its own agenda against India (with Kashmiri proxies) and inside Afghanistan (with Taliban allies). Pakistan has little ability to combat militants and insurgents because the country has in fact aided and abetted those same entities through years of sponsorship, while corrupt police forces throughout the country undermine any credibility authorities might attempt to attain through a new focus on law and order.

Having outlined the scope of Pakistan's challenges, the authors offer a series of solutions which, while plausible and even workable in the Western world, seem to ignore the teleological realities of Pakistan's history, culture, sociology, and society. The authors suggest that Islamabad formulate and implement constitutional rule of law and re-engineer their justice system to further inculcate and institutionalize civilian rule of the military. While facile to offer in an academic model, this ignores the culture of political patronage that has run rampant since the country's inception. The authors do acknowledge that Pakistan's civilian leaders have habitually used the military and security organs to advance their own agendas. If past precedent holds true, this would continue to occur, so it is not clear why they think this "new" suggestion would offer a different result.

The authors propose that Islamabad, presumably with aid from Washington and the international community, invest in their decayed and crumbling infrastructure, specifically in roads, electric power, education, and health care. There is no mechanism in place to do this, so it is not clear how the authors would have this implemented. The main weakness in the authors' recommendations is that there is little in the way of suggestion regarding how to bring these changes about. The authors do propose that Islamabad establish an entity akin to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), but they seem to ignore the fact that such an entity would be subject to the control and whim of Pakistan's rulers, much as it serves the often blatant agendas of U.S. elected representatives who habitually use it to bring selectively to the fore issues they wish to highlight for political gain. The authors do not tie U.S. financial assistance to concrete measures of social and political stability in Pakistan.

The U.S. and Pakistan have divergent goals towards Afghanistan and militant groups in South Asia. The U.S. has seen little return on its multi-billion dollar aid packages, with some success against al-Qaida, but little aid against the Taliban, and Washington has been very inconsistent in terms of holding Islamabad accountable for the aid given in the last decade. This book, while useful in providing historical context and background regarding U.S.-Pakistan relations, is of limited utility for those outside the policy arena. There are better offerings to be had for those interested in intelligence, counterintelligence, and force protection, and at a more affordable price.

Mark Roberts, Transportation Security Administration

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***The Making of a Spy: Memoir of a German Boy Soldier Turned American Army Intelligence Agent.* By Gerhardt B. Thamm. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010. ISBN 978-0-7864-4854-8. Ebook ISBN 978-0-7864-5564-5. 28 photos/illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. 231. \$35.00.**

The Making of a Spy provides a first person account of a remarkable period in history. The author served in the German Army for a few months as a fifteen-year-old "boy soldier." Thamm's account of his service gives an interesting glimpse into the final days of the Third Reich and some of the attitudes of the German people who lived where he made his home. After Thamm enlisted in the U.S. Army during the period between the end of World War II and the outbreak of the Korean War, he began a fascinating career in the intelligence world, which spanned several decades. Although he served until he retired from the U.S. Army, Thamm later had a civilian career with the Naval Intelligence Service and the Defense Intelligence Agency. The major portion of this current work is a recounting of his exploits as a Military Special Agent during the Cold War period when he served in a divided Berlin.

Thamm also had a specific account of his wartime service published by McFarland in 2000, with a paperback edition released in 2007. This work is titled *Boy Soldier: A German Teenager at the Nazi Twilight*. After over thirty-eight years in the field of intelligence and security-related operations, Thamm has written for the *Armed Forces Journal International*, *Periscope*, *Golden Sphinx*, and *The Voice of Intelligence*, and *Naval Proceedings*. In 1994, Thamm was honored by the Central Intelligence Agency for a report which was recently declassified and published in *Naval Intelligence Professional Quarterly*.

The author's writing style provides glimpses of his sense of humor as he details some of his journey through his professional life. Interestingly, although Thamm is a native-born American citizen, he was raised in Germany from the age of approximately two years old. His parents came to America before the Great Depression and his father developed a deep affection for America and all it represents. The father worked for Ford Motor Company until he lost his job in the economic chaos of the great Depression. Gerhardt had been born in the United States, but without close family to provide assistance, he and his parents had to return to Germany. The Thamm's relocated to the farming estate of Gerhardt's grandfather in Janer, Lower Silesia, in Eastern Germany. The Poles and Russians confiscated the grandfather's farm at the end of World War II and the

Thamm family was placed in a condition of forced servitude by the victors. This experience helped to shape young Gerhardt's view of Communists and influenced his attitude toward his work in later life.

When the author relates his return to the United States and his subsequent enlistment in the U.S. Army, it is difficult to fully appreciate the hurdles he faced with a limited command of the English language at that time. His former military experience in combat and his obvious command of the German language were definite assets however, and Thamm describes how a perceptive personnel colonel recognized his value. The assignment in which he dealt with a massive number of captured Nazi documents, containing high value intelligence reports on our former Russian allies, gives today's reader a better understanding of the importance of organization and methodology in approaching the analytical aspect of intelligence work.

When Thamm was later selected for training as a field agent, he was involved in the interrogation of defectors to the West. He also met another interrogator, a star by all accounts, whom he would encounter in a strange way much later in life. His description of his early agent training for the clandestine field work of a spy will seem familiar to many who have had much more recent courses in the same type of work. Apparently, the old statement about some things never changing has more than a grain of truth.

Thamm does an amazing job of painting his sometimes dangerous, but never dull work as a field agent in Cold War Berlin. Of course, he never touches on any classified information; however, the moving way in which he details some of his field work and the effect of his often dangerous activities on his family highlights the sacrifices made by all who are closely associated with this profession. One of the most interesting memories Thamm offers is the story of the attempt to kidnap and "sell" him to authorities in East Berlin. Many people in today's world may not realize just how dangerous and uncertain the Cold War was for the actual participants in the world of spies.

In his recollections of his early training, Thamm mentions the great emphasis placed on targeting potential sources by determining how badly the targets needed money. He goes on to explain that he believes money to be the greatest motivator in persuading individuals to work against the national interest of their native country. Unfortunately, this has proven to be true far too often in the clandestine activities of traitors to the United States. Obviously, the environment of post-WWII Europe, and specifically in divided Germany, provided a fertile ground for recruiting sources that

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had almost nothing left to provide for themselves and their families. However, as Thamm would learn later in his career, not all traitors need money for survival. Some, like those identified in United States history, simply are so greedy that any betrayal becomes acceptable.

This book paints a great historical picture of several important areas. Thamm does an excellent job of describing his military service during the end of World War II as well as in the U.S. Army as our nation began to adjust to the post-war demands of a different kind of warfare. His descriptions of his early training are vivid and interesting. In describing the stress on his family, particularly his first wife, Thamm could be describing a problem from this week instead of from years ago. Any individual who follows the Intelligence/Counterintelligence profession will identify closely with the description of the costs to personal relationships. No one who reads this book will fail to come away with a better understanding of the Cold War operations in Berlin unless, like the author, that reader actually lived the story. In summary, this book describes the early period in the life of a successful spy and leaves the reader curious to know more details about this remarkable man.

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***The Watchers: The Rise of America's Surveillance State.* By Shane Harris. New York: The Penguin Press, 2010. ISBN 978-1-59420-245-2. Pp. 418. Index. Notes. \$27.95.**

The Watchers is a history of the Total Information Awareness (TIA) program. This was an ambitious research and development project envisioned by Admiral John Poindexter, who is at the center of most of this book. TIA as originally envisioned was an attempt to use network analysis and visual mapping technologies to display results from data mining exercises on giant data sets containing information on terrorists. When this technology secretly was moved to the National Security Agency (NSA), it was called the "BAG," an abbreviation for "Big Assed Graph." The types of databases mined included intercepts of emails, telephone call records, flight reservations, financial transfers and credit card reporting, video surveillance, and generally everything that could be captured by information systems, no matter where and no matter whom it concerned.

The groundwork for the approach had been created in the Army's Information Dominance Center (IDC), a futuristic installation designed by Brian Ferren, a Disney engineer. Under John Hamre, the work at IDC led to the identification of a vast Chinese industrial espionage network operating within the United States. As it turned out, this project, code named "Abel Danger," also had identified Mohammed Atta, one of the 9/11 hijackers, and had been handing this information over to the Army's Special Operations Command, which was engaged in al-Qaida hunting.

The problem with all of this work was that in order to capture information regarding terrorists operating on U.S. soil, it was necessary to analyze information from databases containing records of U.S. citizens. As a result, after ninety days, Erik Kleinsmith, who was managing Able Danger, was forced to erase all of the terabytes of data containing information on terrorists and Chinese espionage agents. This was before 9/11. After 9/11 when the Senate found about this, the enraged Senators held hearings. This was one of the early indications that U.S. privacy laws as then written were incompatible with anti-terrorist intelligence operations and analysis.

Poindexter's vision was to have a "privacy machine" built into TIA. This system would code the personal name of each U.S. citizen with an encrypted number. The database mining would work the same way, but information regarding the identities of any U.S. citizen would be "unlocked" only if there was reasonable cause for doing so, probably through an order from a magistrate. One of the great ironies in this story is that when TIA secretly was moved to NSA, the privacy protections were

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dropped. This eventually led to the showdown between Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, as they made modifications to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) laws. Eventually, the courts ruled that it is permissible for the government, meaning NSA, to capture vast amounts of data on U.S. citizens and analyze it if there is reasonable cause to believe it is connected to identification of terrorists. This ruling means that no electronic information from any U.S. citizen or anyone else is protected from electronic surveillance. As the books makes clear, contracts between information services and telecommunications providers with the U.S. Government guarantee that all information is fed directly into the dark shadows of the intelligence world.

The Watchers chronicles the ups and downs of the story and provides many details regarding the principal players: John Poindexter, Erik Kleinsmith, Michael Hayden, Keith Alexander, Mary McCarthy, Michael Wertheimer, Mike McConnell, and an eccentric genius named Jeff Jonas, whose software that had helped casinos in Las Vegas determine if potential employees had any connection to criminals or felons was adapted to TIA. Jonas eventually concluded that the overall approach would not work without endangering the privacy of all U.S. citizens, but he did not say that it would not work.

The author has based most of the writing on detailed interviews with the main persons concerned, combining it with extensive analysis of speeches, books, and it seems every other source available. The footnotes at the end show the details of this research and are worth reading in themselves.

One of the interesting literary touches to *The Watchers* is its starting point: Admiral Poindexter many years ago on his first patrol in the North Atlantic listening for sonar signals of Russian submarines. As the book continues, this sub-hunting exercise becomes an allegory for the sifting through tens of thousands of terabytes of an ocean of data to locate a specific terrorist.

In addition to the details regarding the TIA, this book is a good example of what remarkable men can mean to society. To see what Admiral Poindexter did is to see what a Cal Tech physics graduate and someone at the top of his or her class at the Naval Academy can accomplish. Not only is there a sweeping and comprehensive vision and architecture for a revolutionary program, but also the personal leadership qualities and charisma that enables one to get things done. In that sense, *The Watchers* is a story of genuine and unflinching leadership.

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