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***Playing to the Edge: American Intelligence in the Age of Terror.* By Michael Vincent Hayden. New York: Penguin Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781594206566. Index. Pp. xiv, 448. \$30.00.**

Playing to the Edge is authored by a 1980 graduate of the National Intelligence University (NIU), Michael Hayden, the only person ever to serve as head of both the National Security Agency (NSA) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). And he did this during very tumultuous times including the controversy over enhanced interrogation, and the security breach by the traitor Edward Snowden, which he describes as “the greatest hemorrhaging of legitimate American secrets in the history of the republic” (p. 421). Hayden has had a life-long career in intelligence. In the 1980s, he served as the Air Force attaché in Bulgaria where he recalled that after having his car tailed for several hours by the Bulgarian security services, they pulled up alongside and motioned that it was time to get lunch.

Much of the book discusses the Congress, the press, and the handling of numerous public controversies regarding intelligence. These experiences gave him a sober view of the press. “Be careful what you tell these people. Some are less interested in honest dialogue than listening to rebut and accuse and discredit” (p. 400). He writes about a hypothetical discussion with an intelligence case officer: “It’s authorized by the president [and the] attorney general [and] Congress” have been briefed. But “have you run it by the ACLU? What does the *New York Times* editorial Board think?” (p. 382). But he also used the press. He lauds the website, <http://ciasaveslives.com> (p. 397) and with former U. S. Attorney General Mike Mukasey published a powerful editorial in the Wall Street Journal.

On Congress he notes that “One congressman wanted to know whether or not CIA complied with ‘buy America’ legal requirements for construction materials used in black sites overseas” (p. 229). Advice for briefing Senator Wyden: “Speak slowly” (p. 183). He often expresses frustration. “There are days when a director of CIA is inclined to think that he is running a large public affairs, legal, and legislative liaison enterprise attached to small operational and analytic elements” (p.232).

Hayden covers NSA controversies surrounding the Prism and Stellarwind programs and his book is full of details regarding how public policy was discussed and decided. The same is done on the CIA side, where enhanced interrogation and targeted killings stormed into the public debate. He has clear and compelling views on these matters. On enhanced interrogation:

“[T]he facts of the case are that the use of these techniques against these terrorists made us safer. It really did work” (p. 386). He similarly opines that “[T]he targeted killing program has been the most precise application of firepower in the history of armed conflict” (p. 341). Further, he believes that “The United States will need to keep this capacity and be willing to use it” (p. 344). He expresses irony concerning the prohibition of CIA detentions: “We had finally succeeded in making it so legally difficult and so politically dangerous to grab and hold someone that we would simply default to the kill switch to take terrorists off the battlefield” (p. 242).

The book does not go into detail regarding operations. Hayden doesn’t “talk.” He devotes an entire chapter on intelligence thinking surrounding the bombing of the North Korean-built nuclear reactor near Al-Kibir, Syria, but never mentions who did it. This fits with his general view of the value of secrecy. “Espionage thrives in the shadows, and secrecy is an essential component of its success. Despite a latent plus side (legitimacy, support, understanding), American intelligence has traditionally judged the minus side of going public (decreased effectiveness) be determinative” (p. 422). He repeats the advice Richard Helms gave to Robert Gates: “Never go home at night without asking yourself, ‘Where is the mole?’” (p. 278).

Playing to the Edge is full of interesting anecdotes and descriptions of notable persons. President Bush liked to call him “Mikey” as in “Mikey, get in here!” (p. 372). On Attorney General Holder: “messianic in his focus, politically tone-deaf, and indifferent to contrary evidence and views” (p. 395). On John McCain: “...the election of John McCain would have been more disruptive to the way American produced intelligence than the election of Barack Obama” (p. 354). He describes Rahm Emanuel, Chief of Staff, congratulating CIA on the targeted killing of an al-Qaeda member (p. 342). He notes of Abdullah II of Jordan that “when the king is in the United States, he motorcycles our back roads in the company of a close American friend, a former CIA senior” (p. 322). On King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia views of Iran, Hayden notes: “cut off the head of the snake” (p. 320). As for Obama and Netanyahu: “I suspected that the two men talked past each other” (p. 299). Director Leon Panetta trying to encourage CIA employees potentially threatened by release of information regarding enhanced interrogation was like a “pep rally in the Führer bunker” (p. 382). On former CIA directors “It would be hard to get them all to agree that a certain day was Tuesday” (p. 393). On angling to start briefing candidate Obama “we would work to get access to him and then create as many of what we crudely called ‘aw, shit’ moments as possible” (p. 356). On the Iranians: “They *will* cheat, of course. It’s what they do” (p. 309).

On the head of Afghan National Directorate of Security when visiting Colonial Williamsburg: “Where are the walls?” “Walls?” “Yes. To protect them from the people” (p.316).

Regarding NSA, he mentions “the director’s massive conference table, which looks like it was ripped off the set of *Dr. Strangelove*” (p. 172). He describes a secret visit to Pakistan with Mike McConnell. Upon departure, their jet needed to get fuel: “The crew had forgotten their government credit card—you can’t make this stuff up—and the Pakistanis wouldn’t budge” (p. 348). So the DCI and DNI were sitting on the tarmac in Pakistan with empty fuel tanks.

He describes National Intelligence Estimates (NIE) as having an “...arcane style [and] language” (p. 297). But he himself has a quirky habit of adding the word “period” to the end of sentences, as in: “This does not authorize the collection of content, period” (p. 408), referring to the 215 program; “[O]ff the table. Period.” (p.381); and “[W]aterboarding . . . hadn’t been used for almost five years. Period” (p. 242).

Playing to the Edge is a valuable insiders account of how the intelligence community navigated through difficult years during the Bush and Obama administrations. It is primarily about the practical handling of public controversy and the nature of the public debate regarding the role of intelligence in American society. So it is perfect reading for anyone interested in public policy. In addition, it provides a bird’s eye view of challenges faced by managers in intelligence, and some of the practical ways to handle reform.

General Hayden ultimately is an optimist. And he believes in people. In spite of all the challenges to the intelligence community, he writes that “Good people overcome imperfect structures” (p. 178). But don’t look to him for any leaks about intelligence. That’s not what he does.

Edward Roche