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Raymond J. Batvinis, *Hoover's Secret War against Axis Spies: FBI Counterespionage during World War II*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2014. Pp. xv, 334. ISBN 978-0-7006-1952-8.

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Hoover's Secret War against Axis Spies is a major contribution to the literature on World War II intelligence, particularly the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as a wartime counterespionage organization. It also explores the Bureau's complex and uneven relationships with the British intelligence agencies MI5 and MI6.¹ Raymond Batvinis² (George Washington Univ.) particularly details the FBI's development, with the encouragement of MI5, of double agents to acquire intelligence on the Axis powers' military plans and mislead them regarding US operations. He concludes with an analysis of several FBI case files on important double agents. Despite his book's title, the author focuses not only on FBI director J. Edgar Hoover but also on a large cast of key Canadian, British, and American intelligence officials who dealt with Axis espionage.

In 1940, MI6 detailed William Stephenson to the United States to handle intelligence matters in the Western Hemisphere. His operation, under the title of British Security Coordination (BSC), was based in Rockefeller Center in New York City; by 1943, it employed "more than eight hundred officers, analysts, typists, secretaries, file clerks, and security guards based largely in New York and Washington..." (30). The book chronicles Hoover's dysfunctional relations with BSC and his frustrations with MI6 leadership. In Batvinis's judgment, Stephenson's failure to develop a "balanced" set of alliances with both the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the FBI "unnecessarily sowed the seeds of Hoover's antagonism and suspicion that cost MI6 dearly in the years following the war when the treachery of Kim Philby and Donald MacLean was exposed" (270).

Stephenson's agents made no effort to hide their contempt for Hoover and conducted some reckless intelligence operations in the United States: wiretapping phone calls of citizens; nabbing British sailors in bars and shipping them back to England; attempting to discredit anti-interventionist organizations; and tracking the activities of Percy Foxworth, head of the FBI's New York Field Office. Stephenson's most egregious misstep involved an effort to smear Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle. Confronted with reports of these highly irregular activities, British Ambassador Halifax blithely asserted that Stephenson had acted only in cooperation with the FBI. Incensed at being treated by BSC as though he were stupid, Hoover quite reasonably worried that the public exposure of BSC's escapades on American soil could harm the Anglo-American alliance and "expose U.S. officials to severe criticism..." (37).

Even as it feuded with BSC, the FBI developed a partnership with MI5 based on collegiality, respect, professionalism, and mutual self-interest. Both Sir David Petrie, wartime chief of MI5, and especially his subordinate, Guy Liddell, head of its B Division on counterespionage, recognized the value of good long-term relations with the FBI. As Liddell put it, "The FBI will remain after the others fade away ... and we should lay the groundwork for the future" (93). Liddell's six-week visit to North America (May-June 1942) was the prelude for multiple exchanges between the two agencies. Working in the American Embassy in London, FBI agent Arthur Thurston served as "Hoover's new British Liaison man.... [Petrie] opened up all MI5 files to Thurston..., [providing] valuable information concerning espionage, sabotage, controlled enemy agents, Double Cross techniques, profiles of Abwehr [German intelligence] officials, their tactics and strate-

1. MI5 = Military Intelligence, Section 5 (domestic intelligence and security agency); MI6 = Military Intelligence, Section 6 (foreign intelligence agency).

2. A former FBI Supervisory Special Agent and Executive Director of the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation, Batvinis is also the author of *The Origins of FBI Counterintelligence* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2007).

gies...” (76, 90). Hoover reciprocated by sharing with the British the Bureau’s intelligence on German operations in the United States and welcoming MI5 agents to New York and Washington.

In spite of the close ties between MI5 and the FBI, MI6 thwarted efforts by the two agencies to station a permanent MI5 liaison in Washington. Sir Stewart Menzies, wartime head of the Secret Intelligence Service, insisted that the FBI continue to work with the loathed Stephenson. MI6 did allow the Bureau to post agent John Cimperman to Britain with access to Ultra intelligence relevant to Abwehr operations in the Western Hemisphere, but even here the cooperation was limited. In theory, Menzies and MI6 restricted the transmissions Cimperman could review, but, in reality, he “brazenly and nonchalantly, in full view of everyone, copied entire messages...” (87).

The unhappiness with Stephenson and BSC went beyond Hoover and the FBI. Stewart Wood, Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, described his own ties to BSC as broken (91). Cyril Mills of MI5 characterized Stephenson’s outfit as “polished nincompoops” (92). When Geoffrey Denham of MI5 failed to create a permanent liaison in Washington, he told the head of the FBI’s espionage section that BSC was a group of self-promoting incompetents (104).

Batvinis taps a wide array of archival sources, especially FBI and MI5 records. His reliance on these materials has led him to adopt the perspective of the FBI in his conclusions, for example, in regard to William Donovan. Donovan served first as Coordinator of Information (July 1941-June 1942), responsible for briefing President Franklin Roosevelt on intelligence matters, and then as head of the OSS till September 1945. Batvinis argues that the “helter-skelter” growth of that organization resulted in the hiring of some incompetent personnel, that Donovan underestimated the threat posed by Soviet agents, and that his failure to win the confidence of President Harry Truman led to the death of the OSS. He also calls Stephenson’s alignment with Donovan “a blinding act of political ineptitude” (270). There is little here on any of the wartime accomplishments of the OSS or the benefits MI6 might have received from collaboration with Donovan. Similarly, the author does not consider how the agencies’ wartime work, for all its ups and downs, may have helped ensure Anglo-American cooperation on foreign intelligence during the Cold War. He points out that MI6 paid a high price for its association with Donovan, in terms of antagonizing Hoover, but does not discuss what Stephenson, the BSC, Menzies, and Winston Churchill may have gained from an alliance with Donovan.

On the surface, Batvinis is right to wish that MI6 had taken a more balanced approach to the FBI and the OSS, but one wonders if Hoover would have been satisfied with anything less than complete capitulation to the Bureau’s wishes. Even a tactful British intelligence liaison officer, less exasperating than Stephenson, would have found it challenging to maintain simultaneous alliances with both Donovan and Hoover. And, too, the book underplays the part that Hoover’s turf building, egomania, and vindictiveness played in causing the rift between him and Donovan. Depending on one’s perspective, some of Hoover’s actions against the OSS appear either comic or downright scary. The FBI director sometimes treated Donovan more like an Axis spy than a bureaucratic rival. Historian Douglas Waller notes that the FBI took to reading Donovan’s “overseas mail” and detailed agents to snoop on the private activities of OSS agents, including Donovan’s brother.³

Batvinis finds Hoover more sinned against than sinning in his relations with Donovan, but admits that he was hardly blameless in the conflict. For instance, Hoover unfairly suspected the OSS of trying to wrest control of Western Hemisphere operations from the FBI. Batvinis also acknowledges Hoover’s ruthlessness toward adversaries of his organization. He notes that Hoover once sent his “number three man,” Edward Tamm, to warn Congressman Martin Dies Jr. that the Bureau had evidence that he had taken a bribe: “The dumbstruck Texas Democrat, a vocal critic of the FBI, never made another accusation against Hoover or his organization again” (11).

In the second half of his book, Batvinis relates the stories of several of the Bureau’s most important counterespionage agents. FBI handlers faced a myriad of challenges in running double agents, who were

3. *Wild Bill Donovan: The Spymaster Who Created the OSS and Modern American Espionage* (NY: Free Press, 2011) 127.

sometimes confidence men (often disordered in their personal lives) seeking princely remuneration for their services. The Bureau conducted cost-benefit analyses to determine whether dealing with any particular agent was worth the headaches. In one instance, Hoover personally stepped in to protect the American taxpayer from underwriting the lavish lifestyle of one Dieudonne Costes (code-name Gaston Dechant), a greedy Frenchman who, besides an annual housing allowance of \$4,200 for a “three-bedroom furnished apartment at the Park Lane, adjacent to the Waldorf,” demanded monthly stipends of \$150 for “his wife’s musical accompanist,” \$100 for “English lessons,” “\$600 for food,” \$100 to support a sister living in North Africa, and \$600 for miscellaneous costs (220). In 1943, Hoover described Costes as a “lemon” who had not “delivered a thing” and instructed the FBI to stop his pay and deport him “at once” (221). However, underscoring the self-perpetuating momentum such operations developed, Costes worked with the FBI until the end of the war.

Most of the FBI’s double agents discussed here provided a better return on investment than Costes. Batvinis observes that the program brought real gains in the Bureau’s ability to use deception operations to influence Germany’s military planning. First, the questions the Abwehr asked of its double agents revealed what the Reich most wanted to know about US military production, special weapons programs, and future plans. In particular, Batvinis argues that Germany’s interest in America’s atomic weapon program reinforced Washington’s determination to prevent the Germans from developing the first fission bomb. Second, the Bureau used its double agents to support deceptions undertaken by British intelligence, most importantly in regard to Allied plans for a cross-channel invasion. One double agent, Jorge Masquera (code-name ND38) sent over three hundred messages to the Abwehr in 1942–44, for which the Germans paid him \$46,857.90 (202, 211). Third, despite the FBI’s problems with Stephenson and the BSC, its wartime collaboration with MI5 on Double Cross operations helped Hoover forge a special relationship with the British intelligence establishment.

Any reader interested in the history of the FBI and British Intelligence and their roles in the Second World War will learn much from *Hoover’s Secret War against Axis Spies*. Historians will admire Raymond Batvinis’s scholarly detective work in pulling together his complicated story.