



The U.S. Intelligence Community by Jeffrey T. Richelson.

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“Git thar fustest with the mostest.” This often misquoted phrase of an American Confederate general¹ epitomizes the simplest of warfare strategies, but belies the difficulty of knowing where or when to place one’s resources or what one will face once there. This is the realm of intelligence experts who ferret out facts to aid in decision-making. But most of the intelligence community is concerned with *avoiding* or *preventing* war by gathering secret, confidential, or classified material of one’s adversaries (and sometimes allies) in order to better formulate national strategies. The present volume gives a sense of the massive government apparatus dedicated to collecting, processing, disseminating, and using such data. The late Jeffrey Richelson (1949–2017), a former senior fellow of the National Security Archives, compiled this seventh edition of the compendious yet readable *U.S. Intelligence Community*.

Sound intelligence has always been essential to successful military operations.² But intelligence gathering was not a US priority following World War I; as Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson noted, “Gentlemen do not read each other’s mail.”³ The years leading up to World War II, however, saw an increase in intelligence activity and skill in deciphering both diplomatic and military communications that later aided the Allies’ war efforts. After the war, President Harry Truman disbanded the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), then “authorized studies of the intelligence apparatus required by the United States in the postwar world” (18). The National Security Act of 1947 led to the establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which the author identifies as the origin of the governmental “business” of intelligence (19).

Richelson explains in meticulous detail the functions of the multitude of US intelligence agencies, including, besides the CIA, the National Security Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the little-known National Underwater Reconnaissance Office, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the intelligence branches of the various armed services and civilian departments of the federal government as well as the organization of various Unified Commands within the armed services. He devotes (profusely illustrated) chapters to the varied forms of intelligence—signal, measurement, signature, human—as well as sources, methods of collection, and materials acquisition. He also includes a chapter on information analysis, management, and dissemination.

Discrete sections treat Covert Action, Special Issues (including anti-terror uses of intelligence), Bulk Collection, Transparency Issues and Leaks (on recent developments like the Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden disclosures), and congressional oversight. Of particular interest is Richelson’s contention that

1. Jack Hurst, *Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography* (NY: Knopf, 1993) 247.

2. See, e.g., John Keegan, *Intelligence in War: Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (NY: Knopf, 2003) xx, 387.

3. Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (NY: Harper, 1948; also online) 188.

as a whole, today's congressional oversight represents a pale legacy when compared to the early days of those commissions, first established as temporary bodies in response to charges of improper CIA domestic activities.... The [current congressional] committees ... have a poor record in advancing transparency and declassification and seem to have no real interest in pushing agencies to be more transparent or more responsive with regard to FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests or proactive disclosure. Nor have they been transparent about the oversight process. (577)

This may be either objective commentary or the venting of frustrations by a researcher with limited access to classified material he thinks should be public knowledge.

In such an encyclopedic volume, there are naturally errors and infelicities, but those I noticed were mostly minor. The annoying plethora of abbreviations, jargon, and technical terminology is only slightly mitigated by the inclusion of an ample glossary.⁴ Richelson's discussion of the U-2 spy plane shot down over Cuba omits the name of the pilot (Rudy Anderson). And there is precious little information about the U-2's successor aircraft, the A-12 (CIA designation)/SR-71 (Air Force designation), and its intelligence-gathering missions, even though "North Korea had made hundreds of attempts to shoot down overflying SR-71s" (530). Neglected here, too, is the abundant popular literature, both online⁵ and in print,⁶ regarding this aircraft's history and the interagency rivalry over its management.

Although academics and readers seeking an insider's view of the intelligence community will find other texts more illuminating,⁷ Jeffrey Richelson's final book belongs on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the study of intelligence gathering and government surveillance.

4. Readers should keep the US Dept. of Defense online *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* at the ready.

5. E.g., *Dan's Blackbird Page*.

6. E.g., Annie Jacobsen, *Area 51: An Uncensored History of America's Top Secret Military Base* (NY: Back Bay Books, 2011).

7. See Peter C. Oleson and Robert M. Gates, *AFIO's Guide to the Study of Intelligence* (Falls Church, VA: Assoc. of Former Intelligence Officers, 2016).