
Book Review

New CIA history puts intelligence policy under the microscope

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Agency—The Rise and Decline of the CIA From Wild Bill Donovan to William Casey

John Ranelagh

Simon & Schuster, New York, 1986
847 pages, illustrated, \$22.95.

The first lesson in trade craft that any spook-apprentice learns is that the key to any good cover story is that it be based on a solid, provable foundation of facts. It is precisely in this regard that John Ranelagh's (pronounced RAN-a-lee) quasi-official history of the Central Intelligence Agency is a well written and well documented cover story. The book's merits do not lie in its frank "insider's" documentation of the struggles to create a postwar central intelligence and clandestine operations service. In fairness to the author, any attempt at a comprehensive history of the CIA's first 40 years would require thousands of pages and would necessarily resemble an encyclopedia, rather than a very readable 800-page narrative.

Where Ranelagh's objectives come through, is in the final several hundred pages of the book, where he draws out several important policy insights that are central to the ongoing efforts to rebuild a U.S. intelligence capability, following the disasters of the mid-1970s Church Committee and the Schlesinger-Turner purges.

First, as Ranelagh recounts, before there was Church-Turner, there was Kissinger. From the day that he entered the Nixon administration as national security adviser, Henry

Kissinger asserted the dominance of the National Security Council and its expanded staff over the Director of Central Intelligence and the CIA in all intelligence matters. This administrative coup d'état introduced a strong and at times devastating element of White House politics and prejudices into the intelligence process, and often led to the CIA being excluded from any input into Kissinger-Nixon policy initiatives. With the creation of the Kissinger-Haig "plumbers unit," the precedent was set for later NSC involvement in covert operations that were formerly handled by more trained and experienced CIA personnel, closer to intelligence analysis and more distant from the Oval Office.

The Carter and more recently exposed Reagan NSC dabbling in covert operations, particularly in the cases of Iran and Nicaragua, are the unfortunate offspring of this Nixon-Kissinger administrative shift. As Ranelagh reports:

Very early in the Nixon administration it became clear that the President wanted Henry Kissinger to run intelligence for him and that the NSC staff in the White House, under Kissinger, would control the intelligence community. This was the beginning of a shift of power away from the CIA to a new center: the growing NSC staff. It was both a personal shift of power by the President in his own interests and an institutional shift as well. From this point . . . the agency began to lose influence to the NSC staff under the President's special assistant for national security affairs, who in turn has paralleled and at times challenged the director of Central Intelligence as the President's chief intelligence officer. The technique Kissinger employed was never to say directly what he or the President wanted but

instead to ask for analysis generally, taking out of it what was of particular interest to him. . . . This was matched by procedural and administrative changes that enhanced the position of the White House—and Kissinger—in intelligence matters.

In December 1968, during the transition period before Nixon's inauguration, Kissinger informed then-DCI Richard Helms that he was no longer to participate in the full meetings of the National Security Council. Previously, the DCI had given the intelligence overview briefing leading off every NSC meeting and had been an active participant in that body, which maintained responsibility for intelligence and covert operations requirements for the President. While Helms, with the assistance of Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, managed to reverse this Kissinger dictate, it nevertheless was the beginning of the CIA's great slide into near ruin.

While Ranelagh never quite comes out openly to propose downgrading the NSC as a necessary step toward rebuilding an independent, professional, and non-politically colored American intelligence service, responsible for providing the President with comprehensive intelligence on which to base policy, the author certainly leads the horse to water, and, in so doing, draws out the most important lesson of the book.

The second issue of intelligence policy that Ranelagh addresses is the question of congressional oversight and the need to strike a balance between congressional authority and congressional responsibility to protect U.S. national security—even when a particular policy or operation may be a subject of heated partisan controversy. Here, again, the author uses the method of narrative history and interviews with the leading players to draw the reader to certain implied conclusions that he never explicitly states.

Ranelagh describes the cooperative relationship that the CIA maintained with Congress during the agency's first 30 years of existence:

For the first 30 years of its existence the agency's relationship with Congress was very informal indeed. In essence, the DCI and his close colleagues dealt personally and informally with the chairmen of the important and relevant House and Senate committees (Foreign Affairs, Appropriations, Armed Services), and other senators and congressmen who were "friends" or who had significant political influence in areas important to the agency in Washington. This worked because the agency was trusted, its directors were respected, and it was seen as America's principal defense against the subterranean machinations of world communism. . . . Senator Leverett Saltonstall of Massachusetts, a former member of the Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, succinctly

described the working practice: "Dominated by the Committee chairmen, members would ask few questions which dealt with internal agency matters or with specific operations. The most sensitive discussions were reserved for one-on-one sessions between Dulles and individual Committee chairmen."

Congressional oversight

By the mid-1970s, the Watergate affair and the Seymour Hersh *New York Times* "exposés" dramatically altered the policy climate in Washington, leading to the 1974 passage of the Hughes-Ryan Amendment mandating congressional approval for all CIA covert operations. Ranelagh characterizes the shift and the new problems born of the greater oversight:

Secret operations were not prohibited. Congress simply wanted to know about them. This was almost a contradiction in terms: if Congress knew about operations, they were very unlikely to stay secret. Congress was, in fact, taking up a spurious position. In part this was in reaction to the Nixon-Kissinger technique of "back channeling," and not informing the officials and negotiators about the details of policy. . . . It was also, paradoxically, a reaction against the idea of secrecy and of a secret agency outside of Congressional oversight—something that Congress itself had been anxious to create during the previous 27 years but now decided should be brought under far stricter control.

While avoiding any formal proposal for dealing with a leaking Congress intent on maintaining oversight, author Ranelagh's detailing of the twists and turns of CIA dealings with Congress is a useful guide for developing a policy balance, placing Congress under greater responsibility for protecting national security in line with its stronger legislative oversight mandate.

It is in these and related areas where Ranelagh's work is a useful contribution to the intelligence literature, particularly at a time when intelligence, covert operations, the role of the NSC, and the power struggle between the Oval Office and Capitol Hill are center stage in the Washington political drama.

A British television journalist and former speechwriter for Margaret Thatcher, Ranelagh was, according to his preface, guided through his effort by a group of leading former CIA officials from the first generation of postwar community executives—the self-described "Knights Templar." Ranelagh's four principal guides were John Bross, Walter Pforzheimer, R. Jack Smith, and Lawrence Houston.

As one of these contributors informed this reviewer in a recent discussion, the book posed a unique, and perhaps final, opportunity for a number of dominant personalities from the earliest days of CIA's emergence out of the wartime

OSS to recount their personal experiences and lessons drawn. Perhaps for that reason the book carries forward some of the very flaws and omissions that have marred the CIA through its first 40 years.

What about the bankers' CIA?

While criticizing some of the agency's dirtiest laundry—like the 1950s Technical Services Staff overboard experimentation with psychedelic drugs—and tackling ex-DCI William Colby for his overzealous public display of the agency's "skeletons" (a public performance that prompted former CIA Counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton to view Colby as a possible candidate as America's Kim Philby), the author at no point addresses the CIA's historical marriage to the Wall Street and Old Boston banking establishment. The existence of this "bankers' CIA" as a dominating policy grouping within the agency is perhaps the most sacred cow that Ranelagh chose to leave out of his narrative. Internal details of past covert operations, and overabundance of names of former and current ranking agency personalities are clearly unnecessary elements in a comprehensive history of the agency that at the same time "keeps the secrets." However, to omit the special relationship between the Establishment bankers and the top echelons of the agency is to conceal one of the most devastating flaws of the CIA, one that must be corrected if an effective rebuilding process is to proceed at the necessary pace.

In avoiding the "bankers' CIA" factor, Ranelagh resorted to his most entertaining use of the cover story method. The author painted an unquestionably accurate picture of the dominant role of the Ivy League law schools and the Eastern Establishment old families in shaping the early generations of CIA personnel and policies. (A useful further insight into this wedding of the CIA to the Establishment might be obtained by cross-referencing Ranelagh's book with David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*.)

One former ranking member of the intelligence community, commenting on this particular flaw in the Ranelagh study, told this reviewer, "Let us be perfectly frank. The bankers have dominated large sections of the CIA from the beginning. Through positions like the Inspector General, the Wall Street banks have had such a dominating hand in the CIA that it has been impossible to distinguish the interests of Chase Manhattan from those of the United States. What's worse, this has bred a pragmatism that has badly impaired the ability of the agency to draw any long-term evaluations."

To the extent that the Ranelagh book was, as this reviewer suspects, part of the CIA's rebuilding program—a sort of a recruiting brochure casting out the image of the "new CIA"—it leaves a lot to be desired. This is probably less the flaw of the author than the flaw of some of the folks who highlighted the author's path. They, in their genuine desire to rebuild the agency in their original image, have perhaps once again failed to take a more profound and historical view of what America once was and must once again be.

Nunn surfaces as hand-picked man

by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr.

During the late November developments around "Iran-gate," Georgia's Democratic Senator Sam Nunn has been surfaced publicly as the hand-picked 1988 U.S. Democratic presidential candidate of the Kissinger-Brzezinski Trilateral Commission. Under his recent and present defense policies, Nunn would become a far worse U.S. President than the Buchanan who organized the vast, fratricidal war of 1861-65. Were Nunn elected President, his continuation of the present, treasonous policies of Henry A. Kissinger and the Trilateral Commission would ensure Soviet world-conquest during the interval 1989-93.

Notably, Nunn has been consistently demanding savage reductions in U.S. troop-strength in Western Europe. This pullback of U.S. forces is being pushed by every Trilateral Commission member on both sides of the Atlantic. The actions on defense demanded by Nunn would have exactly the same effect on West Germany that Neville Chamberlain's 1938 deal with Hitler had for President Eduard Benes's Czechoslovakia.

If West Germany begins to pull out of NATO, as Trilateral Commission figures in that country propose will occur after the January 1987 elections in that nation, all Western Europe becomes strategically indefensible, and the United States is automatically reduced to a third-rate power.

We can not prove, presently, whether Nunn is fully conscious of this fact or not. Possibly, he is merely willing to do anything, to say anything, to secure the full backing of the Trilateral Commission for his presidential candidacy. Kissinger, certainly, is fully conscious that what he is pushing is outright treason, and Nunn is backing Kissinger's policies fully.

The argument, that Nunn is essentially a strong backer of U.S. defense-capabilities, is a complete fraud. Nunn does pretend to support some elements in "conventional build-up"; but he demands that these improvements come out of the heart of strategic defense. He also supports, consistently, levels of deep cuts in defense spending which would immobilize the "conventional" capabilities he pretends to be strengthening at the expense of strategic defense.

Nunn's defense posture is not "confused." It is a consist-