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Introduction by Sarah Kreps, Cornell University

With *The Threat on the Horizon*, Loch Johnson adds to his distinguished record of publications on the topic of United States intelligence. The book is part monograph, examining the Aspin-Brown Commission tasked with reforming intelligence in the 1990s; part autobiography, drawing on Johnson's role as the Chairman's assistant on the Commission; and part policy analysis, using the first two sections to draw out more general observations on the intelligence process.

In particular, the book speaks to several important themes that have each received prior scholarly treatment but have not been brought together in such a coherent, well-written way as this. First, the focus on the Aspin-Brown Commission serves as a useful case study for commissions, addressing in particular what their purpose is and when they succeed and fail? Why is it that the 9/11 Commission's recommendations were largely incorporated when many were reprises of the largely ignored recommendations that the Aspin-Brown Commission had made almost a decade earlier?

Second, as the title—*Threat on the Horizon*—suggests, the book addresses the amorphous strategic environment of the 1990s. With the intelligence community's energies oriented towards the Soviet Union for more than four decades, around what central threats would it be organized once the Soviet Union disintegrated? What were the appropriate budget levels? These questions bedeviled not just the intelligence community but, as historian Jeremi Suri notes elsewhere, the foreign policy establishment as a whole. Suri characterizes the 1990s as a decade lacking a coherent grand strategy, instead describing it as a series of "small policy decisions, misguided political controversies, and half measures."¹ Johnson situates the book in this strategic environment, with the commission responsible for guiding the intelligence community into the post-Cold War world.

Third, the book gives us an insider's view on the intelligence process, including the questions of why meaningful reform is elusive, why intelligence failures continue, and why the office of the Director of National Intelligence has little power and high rates of turnover.

In addition to offering their endorsements of the book's prose and praise for its substantive contributions, the reviewers—Jordan Tama, David Barrett, Charles Edel, and Arthur Hulnick—also build on these themes.

Tama, for example, picks up primarily on the question of commissions. As Tama's own work suggests,² when a politically diverse group, much like that of the Aspin-Brown Commission, produces consensus, the result is a powerful signal. In the case of the Aspin-

¹ Jeremi Suri, "American Grand Strategy from the Cold War's End to 9/11," *Orbis*, Vol 53, No. 4 (Fall 2009): 611-627; 613.

² Jordan Tama, *Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Brown Commission, that general consensus was to perpetuate the status quo, “since the commission was created precisely to forestall radical change, and was led by people who did not favor dramatic steps such as the pronounced empowerment of a central intelligence director.” Even the more powerful 9/11 commission was unable to create a muscular office of the Director of National Intelligence, which points to the structural challenges of real intelligence reform that Johnson’s book highlights.

David Barrett weighs in on the theme of the 1990s’ strategic environment, the part of the “much larger story” that Johnson discusses in his book. As Barrett suggests, the 1990s produced much tumult and turnover in the defense and intelligence community. While Les Aspin’s short tenure as Secretary of Defense seems emblematic of this period, Barrett notes that “there was much more to Aspin’s career than his difficult years as Secretary of Defense.” The often overlooked contribution to intelligence analysis and reform deserves the careful attention that Johnson has granted it.

Similarly, Charles Edel grounds his review in the post-Cold War era period of soul-searching. Although impressed with the level of detail in Johnson’s book, Edel intimates that Johnson missed an opportunity to discuss “the underlying power dynamics” that made real intelligence reform difficult. Johnson does point to turf battles—in particular the power of the Pentagon and its congressional allies—in interfering with more significant reform (both in the 1990s and after 9/11) but Edel’s point is fair: Johnson might have tilted the balance between “atmospheric details” and structural analysis towards the broader, more generalizable point about turf battles and bureaucratic inertia.

As with the other authors, Hulnick praises Johnson for his detailed account of the Aspin-Brown Commission and laments the limited impact of the Commission. Hulnick notes that “bipartisan efforts to reach agreement on issues often lead to watered down conclusions,” and indeed this was the case in the 1990s, although against the backdrop of a different environment after 9/11, bipartisanship actually produced meaningful reform, suggesting that bipartisanship does not always mean paralysis. However, building on Johnson’s own discussion, Hulnick leaves the reader wondering what, if not 9/11, would create the impetus for a truly capacious office of the Director of National Intelligence? He also raises a worthy scholarly point about Johnson’s sources. Observing that Johnson “has captured so much of the dialogue actually spoken by the participants,” Hulnick wonders just how Johnson had done so. The seemingly direct quotes improve the readability of the prose but raise questions about whether Johnson took copious notes or whether he had some other source for the dialogue.

All in all, it is clear that Johnson has produced a contribution to the study of foreign policy in general and intelligence in particular. Indeed, as the Pentagon and Congress discuss budget cuts, Johnson’s less-than-sanguine conclusion about the prospects for meaningful reform seems salient. Threat environments may change, but if Johnson’s observations are any guide, bureaucratic and power politics are likely to remain the same.

Participants:

Loch K. Johnson is the Regents Professor of International Affairs in the School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Georgia. He served as assistant to the chairman on the Church Committee, staff director of the Subcommittee on Intelligence on the House Intelligence Committee, and assistant to the chairman of the Aspin-Brown Commission on Intelligence. His latest books are *The Threat of the Horizon: An Inside Account of America's Search for Security After the Cold War* (Oxford, 2011), and *National Security Intelligence: Secret Operations in Defense of the Democracies* (Polity, 2012). He is the senior editor of the international journal *Intelligence and National Security*, published in London.

Sarah E. Kreps is an Assistant Professor of Government at Cornell University. She has undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard and Georgetown respectively and has held fellowships at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (Harvard University) and the Miller Center (University of Virginia). She is the author of *Coalitions of Convenience: United States Interventions after the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2011) as well as numerous articles on topics of international security, which she has published in such journals as the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Security Studies*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *Political Science Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Strategic Studies*.

David M. Barrett is Professor of Political Science at Villanova University, which is in suburban Philadelphia. A former broadcast journalist, he earned an MA from the University of Essex in 1986 and a Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame in 1990. Among his books are *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (1993), *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers* (1997), *The CIA and Congress: The Untold Story from Truman to Kennedy* (2005), and *Blind Over Cuba*, co-authored with Max Holland, scheduled for publication in September 2012. The latter book chronicles struggles inside the Kennedy administration over intelligence gathering operations targeting Cuba, just prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis. He is currently researching a history of the CIA during the whole of the presidency of John F. Kennedy.

Charles Edelman is an Instructor of Strategy and Policy at the U.S. Naval War College. Previously, he served as a Henry A. Luce Scholar at Peking University's Center for International and Strategic Studies and worked as a research associate for U.S. foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations. He also spent several years teaching history and law at a public high school in New York City. His editorials and reviews have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *China International Strategy Review*, the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* and *International Journal*. He is presently completing his Ph.D., and holds a B.A. from Yale University. Currently, he is working on a project on the grand strategy of John Quincy Adams and the United States in the 19th Century.

Arthur S. Hulnick earned his BA degree at the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University in 1957. He served seven years in Air Force Intelligence before joining the Central Intelligence Agency in 1965. Mr. Hulnick was an analyst and manager in CIA, later becoming the CIA Officer-in-Residence at Boston University in 1989. After retirement,

Boston University invited Mr. Hulnick to join the faculty as Associate Professor of International Relations. He is the author of *Fixing the Spy Machine* (Praeger 2000) and *Keeping Us Safe* (Praeger 2004).

Jordan Tama is Assistant Professor of International Relations at American University's School of International Service and Research Fellow at A.U.'s Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies. His research focuses on the U.S. foreign policy making process, congressional-presidential relations, and national security policy. Tama is the author of *Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). He is an American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow for 2011-12.

Review by David Barrett, Villanova University

I want to commend Loch Johnson for the writing of *The Threat on the Horizon* on at least three counts:

First, Johnson is a deft writer and a knowledgeable chronicler and analyst of the past sixty years of intelligence history. He uses the story of the Aspin-Brown Commission which, as he admits late in the book, had only a limited impact on the future performance of U.S. intelligence agencies, to tell a much larger story which is the history of U.S. intelligence from the end of World War II, through the Cold War, and into the era of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and their fateful aftermath. He has structured his book in such a way that, each time he turns to an intelligence topic that the Aspin-Brown Commission considered, he then gives a concise history of that particular function which U.S. intelligence agencies have wrestled with since the early Cold War years. Then he reviews the ways in which it seemed to him and others associated with the Commission that the U.S. might proceed in the coming years with that function. In the closing portion of the book, he takes the U.S. intelligence story forward through an era that included the September 11th attacks and what followed in the George W. Bush years.

Therefore, what might have been a narrowly focused book is, instead, a broadly ranging one. It could even be used as a substantial part of the reading load for graduate students in a seminar on U.S. intelligence. (And the grad students would be surprised and gratified that that particular reading assignment was so approachable.)

Second, Johnson has provided a very substantial treatment of intelligence in the Clinton era which, coming after the Cold War and before Sept 11th, will probably be understudied by scholars. The story is not always a pleasant one. For one thing, Directors of Central Intelligence seemed to come and go much too rapidly. Also, readers almost certainly will find themselves wishing that more leaders who were in and out of government in the 1990s had anticipated the threats which lay ahead. A few did, of course. Loch Johnson takes notes of those in the Clinton years who warned that some form of airborne terrorism was entirely possible. But they were in the minority. On this topic, as some others, Johnson is careful not to engage in self-serving claims to prescience in that era.

Third, Johnson is to be commended for his treatment of Les Aspin, who will go down in history books (indeed already has) as a “failed” Secretary of Defense, but whose greater contributions, mixed in with certain arguable failures, merit sustained scholarly and biographical treatment. Aspin was an energetic, knowledgeable, and talented member of the House of Representatives from 1971 through 1993, and for most of that time served on its Armed Service Committee. He chaired that committee during the last half of the Reagan era and during the George H. W. Bush presidency.

With a penchant for attracting publicity and no reluctance to say what he thought, he did not always endear himself to fellow members of the House. Still, he was a significant

contributor, for better or worse, to aspects of U.S. national security policy during the late Cold War and then briefly served as Secretary of Defense early in the Clinton presidency. There, he floundered. His 'chemistry' with his boss was not good, nor was it great with many of the military leaders of that era. After a series of setbacks, especially the U.S. military intervention in Somalia which led to the deaths of eighteen soldiers, the President announced Aspin's resignation. Most assumed, correctly, that he was forced out of office by the White House.

As Johnson's book reminds us, there was much more to Aspin's career than his difficult years as Secretary of Defense. As the first head of what would come to be known as the Aspin-Brown (for former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown) Commission, Aspin was passionate about trying to steer a future path for U.S. intelligence, something he had already explored as chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. These appointments came in the aftermath of his tenure at the Pentagon. The story of Aspin's untimely death is dramatic and sad. The Commission soon moved on under the leadership of Harold Brown.

In my own research, I often seek out scholarly, detailed treatments of policymakers of past decades whose work was significant but whose lives were not seen as so significant as to merit the publishing of biographies. These are not always easy to find. I think Loch Johnson's treatment of Les Aspin will be much appreciated by scholars of the future who write about American defense policymaking of the late twentieth century.

So, three cheers for *The Threat on the Horizon*, which is not only scholarly but engagingly written, even when the subject matter is not the sort that easily lends itself to clear writing.

By the mid-1990s, a series of scandals and disasters in the intelligence community were appearing in the headlines almost weekly. At the CIA, there were reports of widespread mismanagement, several hundred female officers had brought a sex-discrimination lawsuit against the Directorate of Operations, and Aldrich Ames appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* after having been convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. The National Reconnaissance Office stood accused of purposefully misrepresenting its finances to Congress. On top of all of this, the intelligence community was being criticized for failing to predict not only the end of the Cold War, but also the political upheavals in Rwanda, Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia.

As a result, President Clinton stood up the *Commission on the Roles and Capabilities of the US Intelligence Community*. Its mandate, at least nominally, was to conduct an investigation into the capabilities of the intelligence community. But in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, it assumed a broader mission. As Les Aspin, the Committee's first Chairman who died of a heart attack half way through the Commission's work, asked, "what happens to the intelligence community now that the Cold War is over and the Soviet empire broken up?" (58). In this spirit, the Commission took on the larger task of examining the purpose of the intelligence community in the post-Cold War era.

Loch Johnson, a political scientist who has written more than a dozen works on intelligence and national security, and a former staff director of the House's subcommittee on intelligence oversight, was asked by his former boss Aspin to serve as his assistant on the Commission. *The Threat on the Horizon* is the absorbing result of his tenure there and his reflections afterwards. Part memoir of his time on the Commission, part history of the evolution of the intelligence community in the 1990s, and part primer on how the intelligence cycle works, Johnson writes that he intended this book to be a "citizen's report on what I found during this journey into the dark regions of America's government" (xiv).

While occasionally getting bogged down in atmospheric details, Johnson provides an excellent description of how such a commission functions. He explains how it organizes itself, chooses its members, defines its mandate, figures out the substantive questions it needs to address, takes testimony from experts, identifies key issues and points of tension, drafts a report, and presents its findings. In addition, Johnson draws on his previous works to make this book serve as an excellent and (somewhat) succinct summary of the intelligence community's membership, history, and impact.

In so doing, this book makes two contributions to the existing literature on intelligence—one stylistic and one substantive. Though his descriptions, Johnson brings to life the intelligence process of the 1990's. While this is not James Bond, it is also not a list of bullet points about process. Instead, what emerges is a dynamic picture of issues and tensions within the bureaucracy and how official Washington gathers, analyzes, shares, and, too often, ignores intelligence. Johnson also gives a vivid account of how a National Intelligence Estimate is produced and what goes into the Presidential Daily Brief.

More substantively, Johnson's account of the Commission's meetings and testimony captures the state of intelligence at the end of the Cold War. Through anecdote and reconstructions of various intelligence experts' testimony, taken from his own notes and from classified committee minutes, Johnson establishes the origins of several issues that would come to dominate the debates on intelligence reform in the 2000's. Johnson relays the blunt thoughts of several former DCI's, and the themes that emerge have only gained more widespread traction post 9/11. Specifically, Johnson highlights several key challenges for the intelligence community, including the DCI's lack of budgetary authority and the turf wars with the Department of Defense over resources.

Because this book is a personal story of his own involvement on the commission, Johnson makes no pretense of objective analysis. He is not shy about identifying which commissioners took their job seriously by asking intelligent questions and attending committee meetings and which did not. Putting his analytical skills to use in an amusing fashion, he creates tables and graphs depicting the average number of contributions and comments from each committee member as an aside to his occasionally caustic comments. The book and the reader profit from these personal observations.

However, what serves as one of the book's major advantages—the personal storytelling approach that Johnson employs—is also its weakness. While Johnson does an excellent job describing the dynamics of Committee meetings and commenting on the vagaries of different Committee members, the book at times suffers from too much recreation of each and apparently every expert's testimony. Johnson is cognizant of this, relating that he and his fellow staff members “were beginning to reel from all the information we had accumulated.” (273). At times the reader feels the same way.

The major shortcoming of this book, though, is not that Johnson shares too much information or too many of his own personal feelings. It is that his ultimate analysis of the results of the Committee's work seems to miss the underlying power dynamics at play. Or perhaps his disappointment at the eventual lack of reform shapes his commentary. As Johnson notes early on, but does not fully address, President Clinton was apparently “largely indifferent to bureaucratic reform” and had “only a passing interest” in intelligence (11).

This goes a long way to explaining why Aspin, who had been fired as Secretary of Defense just months before the commission began its work, was chosen to lead the commission. While it is clear that Johnson has a lot of affection for Aspin, it is less clear why he thought that a dismissed Defense Secretary, no longer a political player in Washington, could “make a comeback in Washington” based on the commission's report (11). Since Aspin chaired a commission that the president did not care about, and whose finding would largely be ignored, it is hard to understand how such a comeback would occur.

About half way through his history-cum-memoir, Johnson tells the story of chatting with a committee staffer who was using his office computer more for games of solitaire than for work. Sensing that the staffer, a retired CIA analyst and former PDB briefer, had only a

passing interest in the commission's work, Johnson asked him if he even cared about its success. As Johnson relates it, the staffer laughed—whether at him or at the question is unclear—and asks Johnson if he knew the true purpose of the commission. Before Johnson could respond, the staffer answers his own question, telling the professor that the commission was merely an exercise in “buying time” (282). Both the question and the answer are telling.

The ultimate results of the Commission's work were meager. Clinton signed into law an “emaciated” Intelligence Authorization Act of 1997 that accomplished very little real reform (359). Anyone reading the political tea leaves at that time would not have been surprised. The commission had been created less to address serious policy matters than to provide political cover for the President. The White House needed to appear highly focused on intelligence in 1994. It needed a new DCI, it had to deal with the fall out over Ames's espionage, and it had to head off more aggressive calls from the likes of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to abolish the CIA. But perhaps most importantly, it had to give the impression that it was doing something.

By staying true to his mission of chronicling a “citizen's report,” Johnson seems both amazed and horrified by the politics that shaped this commission. In light of the ongoing reforms and debates within the intelligence community over the past decade, this book is as historical as it is relevant.

Review by Arthur S. Hulnick, Boston University

Professor Loch Johnson has been a prolific writer about intelligence and security matters ever since he served on the Senate Committee to investigate intelligence matters--commonly called the Church Committee—in 1975. He has been a pioneer in teaching about intelligence matters, edits a journal devoted to intelligence issues, and has pressed both the International Studies Association (ISA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA) to include panels on intelligence in their annual conferences. While he is often critical of the U.S. intelligence system, and in particular, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in our many conversations over the years, I have found him to be one of the more reasonable of academics focused on the study of intelligence.

His book *The Threat on the Horizon*, despite its misleading title, is actually a very detailed and comprehensive history of the Aspin-Brown Commission, an investigative group sponsored by both the U.S. Congress and the White House during 1995-96, to determine if America's intelligence system, often called the Intelligence Community, was prepared to face the challenges of the post-Cold War era. Professor Johnson served on the staff of the Commission, and obviously kept careful track of its members, their discussions, and their activities during the course of the investigation. Although a good deal of the Commission's findings were eventually made public, Johnson's insights and analysis of the actual work of the group go well beyond what the public might have learned from the formal report. It is indeed a valuable contribution to the intelligence literature, and makes for fascinating reading.

In the early chapters, Johnson details the Commission's mandate, the members assigned to the work, and the make-up of the staffs. He provides considerable detail on Les Aspin, the chairman, and the man who was instrumental in bringing Johnson onto the staff. Aspin, a former Congressman, had served as Secretary of Defense early in the Clinton Administration, but proved to be somewhat overwhelmed by the job. He was pushed out by Defense Department hard-liners and became the head of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), so he was a logical choice to head the new Commission. In his position on the staff, Johnson became well acquainted with the members, as well as his fellow staffers, so his insights about the workings of the Commission are particularly valuable.

Unfortunately, and after the work of the Commission was well underway, Aspin became ill and died, leaving the Commission's leadership temporarily in the hands of former Senator Warren Rudman, who sought to continue the work, but as a Republican, not expecting to be its permanent head. Eventually, former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown was named to replace Aspin, and so the Commission became known as the Aspin-Brown Commission, the way we remember it today.

Johnson gives us a play-by-play description of the issues that engaged the members as the work progressed, and their struggle to find viable options to carry out what they saw as needed reform within the Intelligence Community. As in so many cases in Washington, bi-

partisan efforts to reach agreement on issues often lead to watered down conclusions, and the Aspin-Brown Commission was no different in that respect. Nonetheless, final recommendations were put on the table, and Johnson spares no effort in telling how this all played out.

In the final chapters in the book, Johnson outlines the findings of the Commission and its aftermath. Sadly, despite the serious work by Commission members, and their staffs, very few of the recommendations ever took root. One reorganizational change that did come to fruition was the consolidation of the various intelligence components dedicated to imagery collection and analysis into what is now the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA), another of the many intelligence components within the Department of Defense. Johnson notes that this consolidation might well have happened even without the Aspin-Brown Commission's recommendation.

One of the main issues the Commission faced was the separation of the role of Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (D/CIA) from the role the D/CIA played as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). This bifurcated position has been created in 1947 when the CIA was established. Previously, the DCI had headed only the Central Intelligence Group. Several other study groups had suggested separating the two roles, so that the DCI could concentrate on running the Intelligence Community, but others had pointed out that the DCI drew his power from his role as D/CIA. Although the Commission recommended separating the two roles, nothing was done. That had to wait until the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York in 2001. In the final parts of the book, Johnson traces that history.

Johnson compares the work of the Aspin-Brown Commission with that of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, headed by former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean and former Congressman Lee Hamilton, and popularly known as the 9/11 Commission. This latter group's work took place in an entirely different atmosphere, and its recommendations were quickly embraced by the White House, the Congress, and the families of the 9/11 victims. Some of what they recommended reflected the work of the Aspin-Brown study, especially in separating the role of DCI from that of D/CIA into a new position called Director of National Intelligence (DNI).

In the final chapter of the book, Johnson muses about the position of the DNI as it emerged in the IRTPA legislation. He notes that the disappointing law created a position with little authority or power, bowing to the demands of congressional conservatives who wanted to protect the Department of Defense from losing any of its intelligence assets. He traces the various steps the DNIs have taken to expand the power of the office, but Johnson suggests that new legislation would be required to give the DNI's office the muscle needed to be truly effective.

Johnson's history makes for easy reading, in part because he has captured so much of the dialogue actually spoken by the participants. It's not clear how he did this, although his other research is carefully explained. Perhaps he intended to write this history once he joined the commission, and kept careful notes. In any event, Loch Johnson has made a

major contribution to our knowledge with this very detailed work. It belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in intelligence, or in how Washington really goes about its business.

Review by Jordan Tama, American University

Although blue-ribbon commissions have generally received limited attention from scholars, in recent years there has been an uptick in research on commissions that address U.S. national security issues. This recent scholarship has found that national security commissions can have a large impact during times of crisis by catalyzing important reforms or helping the president regain the initiative in policy making.¹ Some research has focused in particular on intelligence commissions, finding that such panels have shaped a number of important reforms, but that most commission proposals for intelligence changes during the decade prior to the attacks of 11 September 2001 were not implemented.²

In *The Threat on the Horizon*, Loch Johnson adds to this literature by providing the most in-depth account by a scholar of the creation, operation, and impact of an individual national security commission.³ As I outline below, this terrific case study of the Aspin-Brown Commission reveals a lot about the role of commissions in American politics. At the same time, Johnson skillfully uses the story of the commission to offer an excellent primer on intelligence policy and an insightful assessment of intelligence reform efforts since the end of the Cold War.

Johnson is uniquely well-positioned to write this book because he is not only a leading intelligence scholar, but also was one of the Aspin-Brown Commission's key staff members and was charged by the commission's first chairman, Les Aspin, with serving as the commission's historian. Johnson uses commission records and his own experience on the staff to great effect, making the commission come to life with many direct quotes, colorful anecdotes, and vivid depictions of key personalities. Aspin, the epitome of the Washington, DC policy wonk, comes across as wonderfully passionate about his work, but also absurdly frugal, often disheveled, and unable to make a cup of coffee. He is surely the only chairman of a presidential commission (or former secretary of defense) who liked to meet with an aide at McDonald's over burgers and fries. By contrast, Harold Brown—Aspin's successor as chairman—was formal and displayed a forceful brand of leadership. It is clear from the contrast between the two leaders that there is not just one way to lead a commission.

¹ Kenneth Kitts, *Presidential Commissions and National Security: The Politics of Damage Control* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006); and Jordan Tama, *Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

² Michael Warner and J. Kenneth McDonald, *U.S. Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947* (Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005); and Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³ Two other books provide detailed accounts of the 9/11 Commission, but they were not written by scholars: Lee H. Hamilton and Thomas H. Kean, with Benjamin Rhodes, *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); and Philip Shenon, *The Commission: The Uncensored History of the 9/11 Commission* (New York: Twelve, 2008).

Importantly, though, Johnson's personal involvement in the commission does not lead him to sugarcoat the commission's work or exaggerate its impact. Although Johnson can be proud to have participated in one of the most extensive probes of the intelligence community in American history, he criticizes the commission for opting not to focus on covert action and accountability for wrongdoing, and he offers an evenhanded assessment of the commission's modest influence on intelligence policy.

The commission's establishment, operation, and impact all reveal important truths about the role of blue-ribbon panels. As Johnson explains, Senator John Warner (R-VA)—a strong supporter of the military and intelligence agencies—sought to form the commission as a way of forestalling post-Cold War calls for radical intelligence changes, such as large cuts in the intelligence budget or even the elimination of the Central Intelligence Agency. In introducing legislation to form the commission, Warner was betting that the commission would propose only modest reforms, rather than such radical ideas. As the chief sponsor of the legislation, Warner was a natural choice to be appointed to the commission, and Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-KS) did in fact appoint him. Warner's presence on the commission gave him the ability to try to prevent it from proposing radical changes, though he did not need to work hard to ensure that outcome since most of the other commissioners also opposed far-reaching reforms.

These political dynamics surrounding the creation of a commission are not uncommon. The president or members of Congress often seek to establish commissions to deflect political pressure or preempt an unwanted action. In doing so, they are usually betting that the near-term political benefits of that deflection or preemption will outweigh any political cost they might suffer down the line when the commission reports. Occasionally, a commission ends up issuing a scathing report that is quite damaging to the president or other policymakers, but usually commissions reject radical ideas and calls for accountability in favor of centrist proposals and modest reforms since most commissioners are members of the political establishment. For that reason, creating a commission is often a smart move in the face of political heat. Indeed, in the case of the Aspin-Brown Commission, the gamble paid off for Warner. Johnson observes that Warner saw the commission as a success because it quelled demands for slashing the intelligence budget.

Yet once commissions are established, they often lead policymakers to take actions in order to preempt the commissions' own proposals. Johnson shows that this happened with the Aspin-Brown Commission: CIA Director John Deutch tried to get out in front of the commission by launching a reform initiative of his own. In this way, a commission can sometimes have a significant impact on policy making even before it reports. This was the case with the 2006 Iraq Study Group, led by James Baker and Lee Hamilton. In anticipation of the study group's report, the Bush administration launched its own internal review of Iraq policy in the fall of 2006, which led to George W. Bush's January 2007 decision to "surge" in Iraq.⁴

⁴ Jordan Tama, "The Power and Limitations of Commissions: The Iraq Study Group, Bush, Obama, and Congress," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, 1 (Spring 2011): 135-155.

Johnson's account also reveals the importance of a commission's leadership in driving the commission's outcome. Although there were seventeen members of the Aspin-Brown Commission, Brown, Vice Chairman Warren Rudman, and Commission Staff Director Britt Snider were far more important than most of the other commissioners in shaping the report. Brown decided what issues the report would focus on, and Johnson notes that during commission deliberations, "A Brown or Rudman criticism of a proposal was equivalent to sticking a pin into a balloon" (329). Since Brown, Rudman, and Snider all favored only relatively modest changes to the status quo, their dominant roles prevented the commission from seriously considering radical reforms or focusing on hot-button issues like covert action and accountability. Indeed, Snider told the staff that the commission's "goal is to *sell* intelligence"—a remarkable statement for the leader of an independent panel (79).

Given the position of the commission's leadership, those commissioners who wanted the panel to adopt a more radical approach faced the choice of compromising their views or dissenting from the commission's report. Johnson makes it clear that two commissioners—former U.S. Representative Tony Coelho (D-CA) and former U.S. Senator Wyche Fowler (D-GA)—were unhappy with parts of the report, but they signed onto it anyway, resulting in a unanimous set of recommendations. This ability of the commission to achieve consensus despite differing views was probably facilitated both by Brown's forceful leadership style and by the camaraderie that had been established among the commissioners through their many meetings, including two multi-day retreats outside of Washington, DC. Johnson shows throughout the book that when commissioners disagreed with each other, they usually did so without vitriol, and Rudman in particular seemed to be adept at using levity or good-natured ribbing to maintain a friendly tone during deliberations.

Despite the commission's lack of focus on covert action, congressional oversight, and legal accountability, on the whole the commission deserves a lot of credit for proposing exactly the kinds of reforms that the intelligence community needed—and, in many cases, still needs today. The key problems identified by the commission included inadequate integration and information-sharing across agencies, insufficient interaction between policy makers and intelligence officers, and a lack of sufficient guidance from policy makers to the intelligence community about which issues should be prioritized in intelligence collection and analysis. The commission's proposals to address these problems through steps such as the appointment of a new deputy director of central intelligence for community management and the establishment of liaison contacts between the CIA and various departments were sound, though in Johnson's view (and in my own) the commission should have gone farther in recommending stronger authority for the director of central intelligence.

Ultimately, Johnson explains, some of the commission's principal proposals were adopted, but the commission did not result in large-scale change to the intelligence community. This result was not surprising, since the commission was created precisely to forestall radical change, and was led by people who did not favor dramatic steps such as the pronounced

empowerment of a central intelligence director. The commission's impact may also have been limited by Aspin's death. Johnson observes that whereas Aspin was committed to conducting extensive outreach to the media and public on behalf of the commission, Brown did not engage in a lot of advocacy to promote the commission's ideas.

Above all, though, the commission's modest impact reflected the lack of a sense of crisis surrounding intelligence and national security when the commission reported in 1996. In the wake of a disaster, such as the 9/11 attacks, commissions are often able to shape major reforms because there is a widespread sense that reform is needed to prevent such a disaster from recurring. Although the Aspin-Brown Commission was created in part in response to the killing of eighteen U.S. troops in Somalia and the discovery of Aldrich Ames' espionage on behalf of the Soviet Union, by the time the commission reported there was not a groundswell of concern in the United States about the state of intelligence or about the nation's security. This would have made it very difficult for the commission to catalyze the enactment of a far-reaching intelligence overhaul even if it proposed such a transformation.

All that said, in the end, *The Threat on the Horizon* is more than just a book about the Aspin-Brown Commission. Johnson weaves into the story a very informative overview of the history of U.S. intelligence activities and an excellent survey of contemporary intelligence challenges. He also insightfully analyzes intelligence failures related to the 9/11 attacks and the intelligence community's assessment that Iraq had active weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs on the eve of the Iraq war. Johnson's sensible policy recommendations for today include providing more precise guidance to the intelligence community about policy priorities, placing greater emphasis on human spying relative to technical intelligence collection, and giving intelligence agencies greater capacity to separate important intelligence signals from the enormous amount of unimportant information they collect.

Johnson also assesses the 2004 legislation that established the position of director of national intelligence (DNI), rightly arguing that the legislation did not give the DNI sufficient authority to be a true leader of the entire intelligence community. While I share Johnson's assessment of the shortcomings of the 2004 reform legislation, I would add a couple of points to his analysis on this issue. First, I would assign the bulk of the credit (or, depending on one's perspective, blame) for enactment of the 2004 law to the 9/11 Commission. Although the 9/11 attacks and the Iraq WMD fiasco opened a window of opportunity for reform, the position of DNI would not have been established if the 9/11 Commission had not recommended it, thereby placing heavy pressure on President Bush and members of Congress to back the idea.⁵ This underscores the impressive power a blue-ribbon commission can wield in the wake of a crisis.

⁵ Tama, *Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises*, 156-176.

Second, despite the serious flaws in the 2004 legislation, I think the United States is still probably better off with a DNI than it would be without one. Although the DNI has been considerably weaker and less effective than the 9/11 Commission envisioned, the holders of that office have still managed to oversee some significant improvements in information sharing and coordination across intelligence agencies. If the DCI had remained the nominal head of the intelligence community—without being given new authority—the DCI's understandable focus on leading the CIA would probably have prevented him or her from doing as much to advance interagency integration over the past seven years.

Nevertheless, I agree wholeheartedly with Johnson that an opportunity was sadly missed in 2004 to give the DNI real authority over personnel and budgetary decisions throughout the intelligence community. Considering that reformers could not overcome the resistance of Pentagon officials and their allies in Congress to such a change then—when pressure for reform was unusually intense—it is very difficult to imagine this change happening anytime soon. But it is almost guaranteed that before long—perhaps in response to the next highly publicized intelligence failure—another intelligence commission will be established. When that happens, Johnson's book will provide essential reading for understanding the political dynamics that can surround a commission and shape its prospects for inspiring reform.

Author's Response by Loch K. Johnson, University of Georgia

I appreciate that these four outstanding scholars have reviewed my book on the Aspin-Brown Commission—a substantial commitment of their time, given the length of the study.

Jordan Tama has recently completed a well-received study of his own on national commissions (*Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises*, Cambridge University Press, 2011) and has a deep understanding of how these ad hoc institutions operate. A key proposition in his work is that commissions are more apt to succeed when they face a specific crisis, as in the case of the 9/11 Commission. No such immediate crisis faced the Aspin-Brown panel and, as a result, its findings were less influential.

Perhaps the only major point on which Tama and I may respectfully disagree has to do with the office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), created in late 2004. Tama acknowledges the weaknesses of the office, but he is convinced that we are better off with it than without it. He points to improvements in information-sharing and coordination across America's sixteen intelligence agencies that have taken place since the establishment of the DNI office. I think, however, that—in light of the shock caused by the 9/11 attacks and the faulty intelligence estimates about Iraq WMD—even the old office of Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) would have been able to bring about improvements in cohesion among the spy agencies. Regrettably, though, we have managed with the new DNI office to create yet another intelligence layer—the seventeenth agency. I think highly of Jim Clapper, the current DNI (and a friend from high school days), but he is located in a building that is several miles removed from the CIA, where most of the nation's analysts reside. A DNI at a distance from the nation's top analysts is a DNI without the knowledge base once enjoyed by the DCI—and the only true power an intelligence director has in Washington. To properly lead the intelligence “community,” the DNI should be located at CIA Headquarters (just as the DCI was), armed with budget and personnel authority over all of the intelligence agencies. This is why I continue to believe that the well-intended reform proposal of the 9/11 Commission for an office of DNI failed to bring about the desired integration of America's intelligence agencies—thanks largely to a weakening of the original legislative proposal introduced on Capitol Hill. The Pentagon successfully lobbied against a strong civilian intelligence director.

David M. Barrett, author of *The CIA and Congress* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), is a leader in the relatively young academic discipline of intelligence studies, which began to bloom in the mid-1970s. His painstaking research into the question of accountability over the CIA has been a model for subsequent research on the topic. I was pleased that he found merit in my biographical sketch of Les Aspin, the former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and the first chair of the Aspin-Brown Commission. Aspin was not particularly well-known outside of Washington national security circles, but he was certainly a force within those circles. Unfortunately, though, he has been overlooked in the scholarly and popular literature. I hope Barrett is

right that future scholars will take his contributions to the nation's security more into account.

Arthur S. Hulnick is another leader in the intelligence studies field and his volume, *Keeping Us Safe: Secret Intelligence and Homeland Security* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004) has been an important contribution to the field. In his review, he wonders about my recording of dialogue among participants. I should have explained this more fully. Over the years I have become reasonably adept at taking fast and complete notes during interviews and meetings. This was easier to do on the Aspin-Brown Commission than in an interview situation, because I didn't need to maintain eye contact with anyone. I was always in the room for Commission meetings, but I was seated behind the commissioners. I wrote down their remarks, while also keeping track of their attendance and degrees of involvement in the panel's proceedings. This was an exhausting endeavor that required close concentration. Aspin wanted me to keep track of what was said, so that he could review the proposals of various Commission members as we moved along, as well as to ensure that we would have a history of the inquiry. I also wanted to capture the dynamics of a commission as it deliberated on reform proposals, but I was careful not to set down on paper any of the discussions that dealt with classified details. The latter could be found in the agency documents that were stored in our safes for examination as needed. Yet no formal transcripts were taken of the Commission's deliberations and my unclassified notes filled this gap for Aspin, and were later used for this history of the Commission.

I think Hulnick is right about the title being misleading. It emerged from a suggestion in a pre-publication manuscript review by a professor at an elite northeast university and it struck the fancy of Oxford University Press. I finally yielded on this point, rather than further compromising the production schedule.

Charles Edel is the historian among this group of political scientists and he suggests that I missed the underlying power dynamics at play—a rather damning charge to a study that purports to examine those dynamics. He notes President Bill Clinton's lack of interest in intelligence as the pivotal fact in the life of the Commission. While Clinton indeed had little interest in the topic (as I emphasize in the book) and the President quickly submitted to Vice President Al Gore's lobbying to let Aspin take on the Commission chairmanship, this is hardly the centerpiece of the story. I would argue that it is Edel who has missed the underlying power dynamics at play, which had to do with such personalities as Senators John Warner and Warren Rudman on the Commission, with John Deutch at the CIA, and with the fact that both Aspin and Harold Brown were former secretaries of defense and were ideally situated to protect the secdef's prerogatives over intelligence. All of these matters are examined closely in the study. Edel evidently thinks the President's attitudes and actions were central to this story, but I believe that Bill Clinton was a peripheral figure in this case (and rather involved in his own personal problems at the time); far more central were the intelligence bureaucracy, key lawmakers, and Commission members.

Edel is also perplexed about why I thought a dismissed Defense Secretary, who was "no longer a political player in Washington," could make a comeback based on this Commission chairmanship. Here's what I wrote: "I was pleased to see that my old boss [Aspin] would

have a chance to redeem himself after taking the rap for the administration's train wreck in Somalia" (p. 11). I knew that Aspin was still respected among many national security experts, and that this Commission was the most extensive examination of intelligence issues since the Church Committee inquiry two decades earlier. If Aspin did well as chair, people would take note and that would ease the pain of his failure at the Pentagon. This is what Aspin hoped, and that hope was not unreasonable.

As for the findings of the Commission being largely "ignored" (according to Edel), this assertion confuses the views of the *New York Times* and President Clinton—both of whom did largely ignore the findings—with the seriousness with which the intelligence bureaucracy took the Commission's suggestions and acted upon them, far beyond what was reported in the media (or tracked by the President). The interaction between Deutch and the work of the Commission led to several significant reforms in the intelligence community (the consolidation of imagery intelligence, for one), although nothing splashy or as radical as the *Times* might have desired. Had Aspin lived, I think he would have found himself rehabilitated after his unhappy tenure as secdef, at least among Washington's national security elites.

The staff aide whose comment impressed Edel (the Commission was just "buying time" the staffer told me during the inquiry) was better at playing solitaire on the computer than understanding the changes that were occurring outside his small cubicle. Yet Edel seems to buy into the argument that the Commission was all about providing "political cover for the President." Yes, this was an element of the story, especially at the beginning and from Clinton's vantage point; but the main story is about compromises that occurred on the Commission among individuals of widely divergent ideologies and motivations that erased bold, public intelligence reform; and about a few important changes in the intelligence bureaucracy that nonetheless took place as the spy agencies responded to Deutch and the Commission behind the scenes. None of these results either "amazed or horrified" me, as Edel suggests, though I was disappointed that the Commission failed to seize this opportunity to create a stronger DCI who could bring true integration to the intelligence community. Disappointed, but not discouraged. One day these changes will happen.

Edel notes as well that I spent too much time in the "recreation of each and apparently every expert's testimony." While I certainly did not try to cover every expert's testimony, I understand his point and I probably did too much of this for many readers—sending him (and no doubt others) "reeling." My purpose, though, was to make use of this rare opportunity to witness the most in-depth national commission on intelligence ever undertaken in the United States. I had foremost in mind my fellow scholars in intelligence studies, whom I thought would appreciate the details that I included—at the expense, alas, of a more easily digestible history for the less avid intelligence junkie. Given the fact that no official transcripts of these meetings were ever made for eventual release to the public, my notes on the Commission's deliberations were (in my view) a history worth recording in some depth. I realize that this decision came at a stylistic price; nevertheless, even in retrospect, I am glad that I opted for the more complete exposition.

A final matter: Edel comments that my anecdotes and reconstructions came from my own notes and “from classified committee minutes.” There were no classified committee minutes, and I would never have used (or could have used, for that matter) anything from a classified source anyway. As I pointed out in the preface, there is nothing classified in the volume or anything drawn from classified material. Rather it is a study of the politics and social dynamics of a national security commission at work.

I am grateful to H-Diplo for hosting this exchange of thoughts and, again, I thank each of my much-valued colleagues—Professors Barrett, Edel, Hulnick, and Tama—for their patience in reading this book and for their helpful reviews.

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