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Hugh Wilford. *The CIA: An Imperial History*. Basic Books, 2024. ISBN: 9781541645912.

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Introduction by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, University of Edinburgh

In his latest book, *The CIA: An Imperial History*, Hugh Wilford recognizes the impossibility of being comprehensive. Because the life-span of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which was founded in 1947 and is still functioning today, coincides with the period of America's status as a great power, it would be an unachievable task to cram between two covers an exhaustive account that would need to double as a history of the contemporary world.[1] Wilford wisely chooses a more selective approach. Thematically, he concentrates on the proposition that the CIA was an imperial agency. Methodologically, he employs a biographical approach that in the nineteenth century was associated with the Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881).[2] He by no means entirely goes along with Carlyle's working proposition that great men *made* history. But his narrative does operate on the principle that history can be better understood by taking the human approach, in this case the study of representative leading figures.

The five reviewers see the book as well written, not just stylistically, but also in the way in which Wilford synthesizes a complex argument: appropriately both Thomas F. Field, Jr. and Stuart Schrader use the word "elegant" to describe the author's achievement. Also unanimously, the reviewers see the book as thought-provoking. All of them agree with Wilford's contention that the CIA's mentalities and actions were a manifestation of imperialism. All five of them see this as regrettable.[3] At the same time, each of the reviewers has distinctive emphases and perspectives that enrich their collective dialogue.

Paul Thomas Chamberlin shows how Wilford challenges the "foundational myth" that the CIA was established in response to the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941. Rather, it was a response to Washington's determination to enact an imperial role in the post-World War II era. He notes Wilford's further point that prominent figures in the early CIA, such as Kermit Roosevelt, had private education and Ivy League backgrounds that made them similar to their UK counterparts, and susceptible to the absorption of British imperial ideology articulated by writers such as Rudyard Kipling and T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia").[4] Chamberlin wonders whether there were further "structural and institutional dimensions of the

[1] Two books that did aim at exhaustive inclusivity were John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (Simon and Schuster, 1986) and the much more critical Timothy Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (Doubleday, 2007). The authors of other general CIA and US intelligence histories have like Wilford opted for selectivity. Christopher Andrew in *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (HarperCollins, 1995) concentrated on successive presidents' aptitude in intelligence matters; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's *A Question of Standing: The History of the CIA* (Oxford University Press, 2022) offered an interpretation of salient episodes in the CIA's history.

[2] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (Chapman and Hall, 1940), 1-2.

[3] For an opposing point of view that is more sympathetic to at least one American imperialist, see Adam D. Burns, *William Howard Taft and the Philippines: A Blueprint for Empire* (University of Tennessee Press, 2020).

[4] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Macmillan, 1901); T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Jonathan Cape, 1935 [1926]).

CIA's imperialism" and reflects that the agency was just one of several utensils in "America's imperial toolbox," but still finds Wilford's argument to be "compelling."

Like Chamberlin, Thomas C. Field, Jr., is impressed by Wilford's genius in arguing that the leading CIA men were at heart anti-imperialists who found that operating in secret was a way of circumventing the inconvenience of having principles.[5] Though crediting British influence, he describes the reliance of the United States on CIA-style covert operations, one of the book's "throughlines," as distinctively American. He notes that the biographical methodology "tends to depict a rather episodic history of CIA operations, jumping from highlight (Iran) to highlight (Vietnam)." Field concludes by considering the final section of the book, and Wilford's view of what happened to the CIA and the mentalities behind it after the damaging revelations and congressional investigations of 1975.[6] He argues that some of Wilford's earlier findings on voluntarism, or the recruitment of the private sector for intelligence work, may have a continuing applicability in the twenty-first century.[7]

Molly Geidel highlights Wilford's account of CIA leaders' storytelling, the importance of which is his "most important argument." Imperialism is the "defining feature" of that storytelling and an "attendant orientalism" its unsavory embellishment. At the same time, she applauds Wilford's account of the "homosocial ties" that bound influential CIA actors like Edward Lansdale to their neocolonial collaborators. She illustrates the harm done by CIA covert operations, offering mortality numbers in support of her point (here, it would be interesting to see some comparisons with other countries' imperial violence, and with the global history of the statistics of deadly quarrels).[8] She argues that Wilford accepts CIA leaders' professed anti-imperialism "a bit too credulously," and points to the imperial-style elitist indoctrination of students "which persists to this day in the United States," which helps explain the response of some campus leaders to recent student unrest, and which is, in fact, foreshadowed in the narrative of *The CIA: An Imperial History* (252).

The impact of American politics and society on foreign policy is these days being considered in reverse. To a certain degree taking their inspiration from earlier work by political theorist Hannah Arendt, US historians are taking an interest in the "boomerang effect," the impact of foreign and foreign intelligence policies on American society.[9] Himself an authority on the subject, Stuart Schrader focuses attention on

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[5] The historian Victor G. Kiernan claimed that American imperialism showed a "streak of ruthlessness" that may have been the "contrary effect" of the exceptionally virulent US anti-imperialist tradition: Kiernan, *America: The New Imperialism from White Settlement to World Hegemony* (Zed, 1978), 1.

[6] See Loch K. Johnson, *A Season of Inquiry Revisited: The Church Committee Confronts America's Spy Agencies* (University Press of Kansas, 2015).

[7] See earlier Wilford works cited by Field, culminating in *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

[8] See, for example, Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (Bodley Head, 2022) and Lewis Fry Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Boxwood, 1960).

[9] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian, 1951).

Wilford's indications of how the CIA's imperialist actions have caused "repression, state violence, as well as paranoia" on the US domestic front.[10] He further addresses the issue of why historians, having often characterized the actions of the CIA as imperialist, have—until the publication of *The CIA: An Imperial History*—refrained from devoting serious analysis to the issue. He argues that the over-classification of formerly secret information is one factor that helps explain the previous absence of scholarship. Finally, Schrader asks why the US continued to pursue its clandestine imperial course for so long after Wilford's original Anglophile, Ivy League actors passed from the scene. Do more recent leaders like Directors of Central Intelligence (DCIs) Gina Haspel and David Petraeus fill the void, as Wilford suggests? Or, Schrader asks, are all such characters "powerless amid forces far larger than them?"

Opening his erudite assessment of Wilford's book, Simon Willmetts points out that the idea of the CIA as an instrument of imperialism has been standard fare for leaders in the affected countries and for Soviet propagandists, as it has been for US historians like William Appleman Williams, historians who nevertheless failed to follow up with a thorough examination of the subject.[11] Like Schrader's, in this way his review underlines the originality and importance of *The CIA: An Imperial History*. In stating that "individual agency mattered," Willmetts endorses Wilford's biographical methodology. He does, however, issue a qualification and a plea for expansion. The qualification is that, while America's imperialism has largely been "new" or indirect in character, the United States does have, in addition, numerous colonial, mainly insular, overseas possessions.[12] Their story, he believes, needs to be more firmly included in the historiography of American imperialism, the imperialism of the CIA included. Finally, Willmetts draws attention to Wilford's acknowledgement of how his approach concentrates on the role of US male elites. Willmetts makes a plea for expansion: "What might a subaltern history of the CIA look like?"[13]

Responding to the reviewers of his book, Wilford enriches the discussion and defends his essential positions. He agrees that the biographical approach needs to occur in a wider context and supports Willmetts's appeal for more scholarship on the subaltern history of CIA imperialism. Yet he does "still think that these individuals mattered." He suggests that his reviewers have underestimated the role of missionaries in promoting anti-imperialist views. He offers a blistering supplement to Schrader's view that

[10] Stuart Schrader's contributed thoughts on the boomerang effect in his book *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (University of California Press, 2019).
[11] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (W.W. Norton, 1972).
[12] On the "'pointillist' empire of military bases and outposts," Willmetts cites Daniel Immerwahr, "The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in US History," *Diplomatic History*, 40:3 (2016), 373-391, and Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2019). A further exploration of the history of the United States' territorial holdings is Adam D. Burns, *American Imperialism: The Territorial Expansion of the United States, 1783-2013* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).
[13] The term "subaltern" as used by Willmetts refers to native social groups that are excluded from the decision-making processes of governing elites, such as the orchestrators of foreign imperialism and their indigenous collaborators.

overclassification has suffocated scholarship in the CIA's imperialism. Practitioners themselves, he contends, have done the field a disservice by seeking "revelations" and "archival smoking guns."

Wilford affirms his thesis that the CIA's concealments sprang from Cold War circumstances combined with guilt concerning the abandonment of the nation's historic mission, anti-imperialism. One might argue that further reasons were the decision of US leaders to forego gunboat diplomacy at the Montevideo Conference of American States in 1933, and the United Nations Charter of 1945 that outlawed the legality of war, if not war itself.[14] To continue on the subject of omissions, the contributors to this round table pay no heed to a further legal provision, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.[15] It was this law, a reaction to 9/11, that redistributed some of the CIA's covert functions. Everyone is selective when writing about the CIA. The challenge is to weave a credible history from one's selection. Without by any means abandoning their critical duty, the reviewers rightly applaud Hugh Wilford in his attempt to meet that challenge.

Contributors:

Hugh Wilford is Professor of History at California State University, Long Beach, and the author of five monographs, including *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press, 2008) and *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Basic Books, 2013). He has also created a video lecture series for the Great Courses, *The Agency: A History of the CIA* (2019). In addition to ongoing research in intelligence history, he is at work on a book about emotion and intimacy in the history of Anglo-American relations.

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones is emeritus Professor of American History at the University of Edinburgh and honorary president of the Scottish Association for the Study of America. He was the editor of *Eagle Against Empire: American Opposition to European Imperialism, 1914–1982* (Publications Université de Provence for European Association for American Studies, 1983). His other books include *A Question of Standing: The History of the CIA* (Oxford University Press, 2022). His latest work is *Allan Pinkerton: America's Legendary Detective and the Birth of Private Security* (Georgetown University Press, 2025).

Paul Thomas Chamberlin is an Associate Professor of History at Columbia University and the author of *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War*

[14] Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, International Law Students Association, https://www.ilsa.org/Jessup/Jessup15/Montevideo%20Convention.pdf; Charter of the United Nations, United Nations Treaty Collection, https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf.
[15] United States Congress, Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/senate-bill/2845.

Order (Oxford, 2012) and *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (HarperCollins, 2018). His next book, *Scorched Earth: A Global History of World War II* will be published by Basic Books in May 2025.

Thomas Field is Professor of Social Sciences at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He is the author of *From Development to Dictatorship* (Cornell University Press, 2014), which won the McGann Prize from the Rocky Mountain Council for Latin American Studies, and co-editor with Stella Krepp and Vanni Pettinà of *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020). For his research on development, labor, and empire in the contemporary Global South, Field has received the 2021 Cherny Article Prize from the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, and SHAFR's 2012 Bernath Article Prize.

Molly Geidel is an Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Dartmouth College. She is the author of *Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015). She is working on two books, one on international development and documentary film, forthcoming from University of California Press, and the other on the figure of the counterinsurgent girl, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

Stuart Schrader is the Director of the Chloe Center for the Critical Study of Racism, Immigration, and Colonialism and Associate Professor of History at Johns Hopkins University. He is the author of *Badges Without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (University of California Press, 2019).

Simon Willmetts is Associate Professor of Intelligence Studies at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs of Leiden University. His research focusses upon the social, cultural, and political consequences of government secrecy and intelligence work in the United States. He is the author of *In Secrecy's Shadow: The OSS and CIA in Hollywood Cinema, 1941-1979* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016). His work has also appeared, among other places, in *American Quarterly*, *Diplomatic History*, *Intelligence and National Security* and *Journal of American Studies*.

Review by Paul Thomas Chamberlin, Columbia University

In his latest study of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The CIA: An Imperial History*, Hugh Wilford seeks to reframe the agency as an organ of America's post-1945 global empire. He begins by challenging the foundational myth that portrays the agency as having emerged in response to the Pearl Harbor attack, an event that served as a wake-up call, rousing Americans from their isolationist torpor, and inducing them to adopt a clear-eyed, hard-headed approach to foreign dangers. Historians have tended to approach the CIA as a product of the Cold War national security concerns.[1] Instead, Wilford argues that the need for the CIA was linked to Washington's decision to accept an imperial role in international affairs, particularly in the postcolonial world, after 1945 (1-4). The emergence of the so-called Third World as one of the principal battlefields of the Cold War thrust the agency, and clandestine intelligence more broadly, to the fore of the US foreign policy establishment.

Wilford adopts a biographical approach, focusing each chapter on the career of one key CIA official: Sherman Kent, Kermit Roosevelt, Edward Lansdale, James Jesus Angleton, and Cord Meyer. The book begins with a discussion of European intelligence agencies and their role in policing colonies. Wilford argues that British and French authorities understood intelligence as a key means of exercising control over colonized peoples and keeping a lid on potential nationalist troubles. These same agencies—particularly the British—became midwives to the birth of the CIA. Wartime collaboration between British MI6 (Military Intelligence, Section Six) and American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officers convinced key players in the US government of the importance of maintaining a professional intelligence agency. But this was only the beginning. Hailing from elite East Coast boarding schools and Ivy League universities, the founding generation of CIA officers emerged from a culture that was often strikingly similar to that of their English colleagues (38-44). Aspiring American intelligence officers, like their British counterparts, were enamored with romanticized tales of swashbuckling Western heroes such as Rudyard Kipling's Kim and the real life T.E. Lawrence.[2] Having been raised on a steady diet of Trans-Atlantic elitism, imperialism, and orientalism, the future leaders of the CIA proved eager pupils of their imperial tutors.

Upon entering the postcolonial world as agents of Washington's new covert empire, many officials became enamored with the trappings of everyday colonial life. Poorly paid public servants in the United States and Western Europe could afford to live as wealthy elites in postcolonial cities across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Many officers' daily lives seem to have been lifted from nineteenth century accounts of British colonial officials. Like latter-day Lawrences of Arabia, CIA officers who were stationed in former imperial capitals like Saigon and Beirut enjoyed opulent lives complete with house-servants, local mistresses, and

[1] John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (Simon and Schuster, 1986); Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones (Yale University Press, 1989); Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (Doubleday, 2007).
[2] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Macmillan, 1901); T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Jonathan Cape, 1935 [1926]).

close male friendships with postcolonial leaders. Immersed in this atmosphere, US intelligence officers gradually developed orientalist views and even personas.

Nevertheless, Wilford is careful to point out that most of the key players in his story remained, at least in their own minds, opponents of formal colonialism and supporters of nationalist forces across much of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. How was it, then, that these figures managed to create and oversee an intelligence organization that pursued imperial goals? The answer, according to Wilford, lies in the US decision to begin behaving as an empire-in-denial after 1945. By the start of the Cold War, US public opinion and the worldwide decolonization movement had rendered outright colonialism odious, forcing the United States to conceal its imperial ambitions. He argues that the CIA became a key instrument that allowed Washington to conduct imperialist foreign policies while still claiming to be a champion of self-determination and anti-colonialism. Meanwhile, deep cultural affinities for earlier expressions of orientalism and romanticized depictions of colonialism had primed American officers for the "opportunities for frontier adventure, masculine intimacy, and sexual license afforded by the global Cold War" (307).

The result of this process, Wilford argues, mirrored the European imperial experience. The United States meddled frequently in the political affairs of smaller nations across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, often to disastrous effect. Early ventures in places such as Iran, Guatemala, and South Vietnam sowed the seeds for later troubles. Likewise, the CIA's playbook of surveillance operations, propaganda, psychological experimentation, and dirty tricks would return home in an "imperial boomerang" effect during the tumultuous middle decades of the Cold War with stunts such as the domestic espionage program Operation CHAOS (167-174) and the experiments with brainwashing and psychedelics as part of the MKULTRA program (257-259). In addition to increased congressional oversight during the mid-1970s, such actions nourished a growing cynicism among the US public along with a disturbing susceptibility to fringe conspiracy theories. Conversely, Wilford points out that a steady diet of patriotic propaganda beginning in the 1980s prepared many Americans to embrace the post-9/11 reboot of the CIA as a paramilitary force using a fleet of drones to stage secret assassinations around the world while operating a global network of black site prisons.

Many of the events discussed in the book will be familiar to US foreign relations historians and to those who have read Wilford's earlier work such as the *Mighty Wurlitzer* and *America's Great Game*.[3] But there are also surprises, such as Edward Lansdale's successful efforts to flip the script of the 1958 adaptation of *The Quiet American*, remaking Alden Pyle as the protagonist (217), or the CIA's demands to review the manuscript for Alfred McCoy's study of CIA-supported drug trafficking in Southeast Asia (227).[4] *The CIA: An Imperial History* also provides a short but damning exploration of the links between academia and the intelligence community. While anthropologists and psychologists come off the worst in this analysis,

[3] Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Basic Books, 2013); Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press, 2008).
[4] Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia* (Harper & Row, 1972).

Wilford does note that at least seven postwar presidents of the American Historical Association had served in the OSS (255).

But the book's most important contribution lies in Wilford's interpretive efforts to situate the CIA's history in the larger context of empire. In this regard, the book is very much in keeping with the imperial turn in the study of US foreign relations history and it should prove valuable to scholars exploring the more shadowy dimensions of American imperialism.[5] Moreover, Wilford has long since established himself as a leading scholarly authority on the history of the CIA and the book reflects his deep knowledge, which was acquired after long study.

For all its strengths, the book left this reviewer with some questions, many of which stem from Wilford's use of a biographical approach to the topic. This focus on individuals succeeds both stylistically and analytically as a way of tracing the deep cultural affinities of key CIA officers who shaped the Agency for over eight decades. Likewise, this approach allows Wilford to draw striking connections and parallels between American intelligence officers and their British imperial forebears. However, the book's focus on biography sometimes has the effect of drawing attention away from the structural and institutional dimensions of the CIA's imperialism, leaving the impression that it was the choices and actions of the individuals themselves driving events rather than the overall structure of the agency and of US foreign policy more broadly. This does not appear to be Wilford's intention; as he states in his conclusion, the structural constraints of America's Cold War policy led officers with anti-colonial sentiment to help implement imperialist policies.

But it does raise questions of how important the CIA was in directing the United States down the path to empire. As Wilford explains in his prologue, the imperial history of the United States begins in the nineteenth century, if not before. The US government employed scouts and spies during the era of continental expansion and relied on intelligence to secure the new territories gained in the 1890s (11). Likewise, generations of US soldiers, diplomats, mercenaries, and political and business leaders treated Latin America as a playground for their imperialist ventures.[6] Thus, for example, one can trace the lineage of US military officers from the Indian Wars of the 1880s, through the Philippine-American War, to the First and Second World Wars, to the postwar occupation of Japan. To what degree did similar experiences shape the imperial history of the CIA? Did the agency spearhead Washington's embrace of Cold War imperialism or was it simply one instrument in America's imperial toolbox?

Such questions aside, however, *The CIA: An Imperial History* constitutes a compelling and provocative intervention in the literature on the US intelligence establishment. It deserves a broad readership among

[5] See for instance Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019) and A.G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton University Press, 2018).
[6] See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Making of An Imperial Republic* (Picador, 2021) and Scott Martelle, *William Walker's Wars: How one Man's Private American Army Tried to Conquer Mexico, Nicaragua, and Honduras* (Chicago Review Press, 2019).

scholars of intelligence history and the imperial history of the United States. By framing the CIA in the deeper history of American empire, Wilford has written a book that will demand the attention of all future scholars studying the agency.

Review by Thomas C. Field Jr., Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

In this elegant synthesis of the history of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Hugh Wilford furthers his reputation as the next generation's dean of intelligence history. Over the past two decades, Wilford's work has been a breath of fresh air in a field which is sometimes accused of harboring a contradictory gaggle of cranks and apologists.[1] His ecumenical approach to the study of intelligence draws equally on critical theory and foreign policy realism to produce historical literature useful for both enemies and defenders of the American Imperium, a largely covert project launched by the United States of America after World War II.[2]

The CIA wears its theoretical framework out in front, albeit lightly. The United States built a global empire after World War II, Wilford writes in a frank introduction, citing everyone from Odd Arne Westad to Daniel Immerwahr and Paul Kramer, who, while differing on other matters, agree that it is useful to think about empire when explaining the contemporary history of US foreign relations.[3] Having established a provocative framework, Wilford then delivers his book's *raison d'être*. Unlike previous Western empires, which were comfortable with the language of empire, the global United States was cloaked from the outset behind positive ideologies like democracy, development, and modernization theory. In part born out of concern about the shakiness of domestic consensus for overseas power projection, Washington's developmentalist empire builders thus relied on secrecy and front organizations to construct a "covert empire" (8-10). This tactical imperative forced the CIA and its fronts to take lead on a growing number of foreign policies first in Europe under the Marshall Plan and then throughout the Global South during the eras of Point Four and United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 5-7).

To Wilford's credit, there is nothing normative in his employment of imperial theory. It is wielded not to condemn, but to better understand the CIA's indispensable role in postwar United States foreign policy. Even when engaging with revisionist theory of economic determinism, Wilford's narrative zooms out to recall that broad-based peace and prosperity across nations has always been a concern of empires and

[1] Both charges are exaggerated, since one can find much empirical value in popular works and in higher-brow policy scholarship. For examples of the former, see Timothy Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (Vintage, 2008); and Tom O'Neill, *Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the Secret History of the Sixties* (Hachette Books, 2020). Well-regarded works in the latter camp are Christopher Andrew, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive* (Basic Books, 1999); and Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution to the Iraq War* (Cornell University Press, 2011).

[2] Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Basic Books, 2013); Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Harvard University Press, 2008); Helen Laville and Wilford, eds., *The U.S. Government, Citizen Groups, and the Cold War: The State-Private Network* (Routledge, 2006); Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (Frank Cass, 2003).

[3] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2019); Paul Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011): 1348–1391.

superpowers. If "Les Americains sont formidables," as Wilford cites one French diplomat describing the CIA in the 1960s (75), it was precisely because they had learned to differentiate between the management of global capitalism and the rather myopic temptation of "leaping into action at the bidding of a particular corporation" (225). The upshot of this reencounter with imperial analysis is that it provides a readymade answer for why United States expansion actually accelerated after the fall of Communism in Europe, in part through a host of post-Vietnam "democracy promotion" offspring of the CIA.[4]

In terms of specific praise, the prologue is useful in advancing Wilford's main argument that United States global power was a continuation of late European colonialism. His fluency with early CIA culture comes across here, though in a more biographical form than his earlier work. His main point, dovetailing with Evan Thomas's excellent book, is that individual life stories help to elucidate how the Agency (and postwar US diplomacy more broadly) was built on the sometimes-contradictory foundation of Anglophilic Eastern elites and salt-of-the-earth Protestant missionaries.[5] What unites these two American subcultures is what Wilford calls the "imperial impulse," a desire to engage and uplift nations outside the formal borders of the United States (27-32).

As Wilford's first major trade publication, *The CIA* contains a domestic United States bias not present in his earlier work, and it employs an appealing biographical approach. Combined, this produces a slightly flatter version of the Agency than that which appears in Wilford's previous books on how the CIA liaised with nongovernment organizations such as political parties, trade unions, press outlets, and groups dedicated to feminism and civil rights.[6] Moreover, it tends to depict a rather episodic history of CIA operations, jumping from highlight (Iran) to highlight (Vietnam) and giving relatively shorter shrift to the long-run political and psychological operations that defined Washington's covert postwar empire for most countries in the world. Indeed, it was a repertoire of long-term relationships built during quotidian influence operations that facilitated the White House authorization of the more infamous "regime change" or "regime maintenance" actions during crisis situations. For a related reason, it seems odd to frame as "At Home" the book's analysis of CIA's role in overseas operations of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the National Student Association, and the American Federation of Labor (208-211). The late 1960s exposure of these operations was indeed a US domestic scandal, but for the target countries, where intellectuals, students,

[4] Recent research on the late Cold War in Latin America provides clues as to how the interventionist impulses of liberal internationalism would survive the decline of superpower rivalry. See William Michael Schmidli, *Freedom of the Offensive: Human Rights, Democracy Promotion, and US Interventionism in the Late Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2022); and Lars Schoultz, *In Their Own Best Interest: A History of the US Effort to Improve Latin Americans* (Harvard University Press, 2020).

[5] Evan Thomas, *The Very Best Men: The Daring Early Years of the CIA* (Simon & Schuster, 2006).

[6] Helen Laville and Wilford, eds., *The U.S. Government, Citizen Groups, and the Cold War*; Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War*; and Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*..

and workers were pitted against one another by secret US- and Soviet-funded civil society organizations, the stakes were somewhat higher.[7]

These minor critiques, which amount to an insider's nostalgia for vintage works by Wilford, lead into the book's strong and surprisingly policy-relevant finale. Starting on page 220, the book veers into the origins and unfolding of 1975, which eventually became known as the Year of Intelligence, when the 94th United States Congress launched aggressive oversight of the intelligence community in a way never seen before or since. Motivated by a mixture of liberal and conservative populist moralism, United States senators and representatives took the CIA to task for a series of alleged crimes revealed during almost a decade of Vietnam-era journalistic exposés.[8] One of the book's throughlines is that the United States empire differed from those of its Western European forebears principally in its reliance on covert action, which momentarily begged the question of how the Global United States would fare after its leading intelligence service had its wings clipped in the late 1970s.

Not bad, as we learn in the book's epilogue, which is so strikingly dissonant that it might have been more effective at back of the book, after the conclusion. Largely a result of Washington's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Wilford argues in the epilogue that the CIA was no longer in charge of the nation's intelligence. "Coups," Wilford acknowledges, were now just as likely to be carried out in the open, through nongovernmental organizations tied to what he calls the "CIA-descended National Endowment for Democracy" (311). As Wilford's earlier work regarding the intimacy between nongovernment agencies and spy craft demonstrates, there was certainly some continuity here.[9]

More importantly, this means that to write the history of United States intelligence after 1975, it will be necessary to expand one's view beyond the CIA, taking stock of how despite the reforms of the 1970s, covert actions (or USAID "quiet ops") were now less regulated than ever before. This was apparently by design, with Congress once again conveniently trapped in a cycle of negligent oversight followed by empty bouts of moral panic when crank "conspiracy theories" turned out to have been at least partially true.[10]

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[7] See Stephen G. Rabe, *US Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Harvard University Press, 2015); and Thomas C. Field Jr., "Union-Busting as Development: Transnationalism, Empire, and Kennedy's Secret Labour Programme for Bolivia," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 52 (2020), 27-51.

[8] International history scholarship is lacking on the CIA battles of the 1970s, but the era has left its mark on intelligence studies. See Loch K. Johnson, *A Season of Inquiry Revisited: The Church Committee Confronts America's Spy Agencies* (University Press of Kansas, 2015); and John Prados, *William Colby and the CIA: The Secret Wars of a Controversial Spymaster* (University Press of Kansas, 2009).

[9] See Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*.

[10] Desmond Butler, et al, "Senator: USAID's Cuba Hip-Hop Project 'Reckless," *Associated Press*, 11 December 2014, https://apnews.com/music-general-news-548798feb950406d8e23186e77359f8f.

Review by Molly Geidel, Dartmouth College

In summer 2024, intelligence and its failures seemed to be everywhere. The August newspaper headlines were dominated by stories about Evan Gershkovich, the *Wall Street Journal* reporter who was charged with espionage in Russia and released in a prisoner swap involving 23 other prisoners from seven countries, and Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's lead negotiator, who was assassinated in a closely guarded Iranian guesthouse (suggesting Mossad infiltration of the Iranian government).[1] Obituaries, too, commemorated lives intertwined with intelligence, from Randy Kehler, the antiwar activist who inspired Daniel Ellsberg to leak the Pentagon Papers in 1971, to James C. Scott, the towering theorist of state power and resistance who, it turns out, did a stint with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in his youth.[2] The CIA similarly provided the punch line for the *New York Times'* obituary for Lewis Lapham, the former editor of *Harper's*:

> Some readers saw a contradiction in Mr. Lapham's affluent life and his stalwart liberalism. But he said he made his choice soon after graduating from Yale, when he applied for a job with the CIA, then a bastion of Ivy League elitism.
>
> The first question he was asked, he said, was "When standing on the 13th tee at the National Golf Links in Southampton, which club does one take from the bag?"
>
> "They wanted to make sure you were the right sort," he explained.
>
> He found the question off-putting and dropped his spy ambitions for a career in journalism, although he said he knew the answer: a 7-iron.[3]

This anecdote encapsulates many of the points that Hugh Wilford makes in his innovative and entertaining new book *The CIA: An Imperial History*, a book that will interest academics and popular audiences alike. Drawing on a broad array of scholarly histories as well as the papers and memoirs of key CIA officers, Wilford characterizes the Cold War CIA as a male-dominated and intensely masculine milieu, one where sport and spying were both analogically and practically interlinked. As the Lapham story indicates, this milieu was also a rarefied one, drawing its officers almost exclusively from WASP, prep-school, and Ivy League backgrounds. This meant, as Wilford emphasizes, that CIA officers came from and consolidated an

[1] For some of the prisoner-swap details, see Will Grant, Cai Pigliucci, and Thomas MacKintosh, "Americans Freed in Russia Prisoner Swap Reunite with Families" *BBC News*, 2 August 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cv2g2dx7d9wo. On Haniyeh, see Ronen Bergman, Mark Mazzetti and Farnaz Fassihi, "Bomb Smuggled into Tehran Guesthouse Months Ago Killed Hamas Leader," *New York Times*,1 August 2024, A1.

[2] Clay Risen, "Randy Kehler, 80, Dies; Peace Activist Inspired Release of Pentagon Papers," *New York Times*, 3 August 2024, B7; Trip Gabriel, "James C. Scott, Iconoclastic Social Scientist, Dies at 87," *New York Times*, 1 August 2024, A17.

[3] Robert D. McFadden, "Lewis H. Lapham, Harper's Editor and Piercing Columnist, Dies at 89," *New York Times*, 24 July 2024, B11.

insular aristocratic culture that tended to venerate an older generation of heroes from British and French imperialist fiction and history. Wilford argues that despite their stated intentions to the contrary, this admiration often led officers to behave in ways that were strikingly similarly to those of colonial officials.

Lapham's story, detailing as it does his deliberation between the CIA and a journalistic career path, also illustrates what is perhaps Wilford's most important argument, that "spying is about secrecy, but it is also about storytelling" (193). Spying is about storytelling in ways many readers are familiar with; it involves the manufacturing of cover stories and elaborate psychological operations, and it occurs in the first place because of larger stories of good and evil, of ideals that one might lie and even kill to defend. One of the fascinating aspects of Wilford's book, however, is its explication of how spying has been about storytelling in a more concrete and literary sense. Key figures who shaped the CIA moved in and out of the literary world, not only reading stories but also frequently writing them. This entanglement, Wilford shows, meant that the intelligence the CIA collected, interpreted, and manufactured was perpetually inflected by the literary and publishing worlds in which its architects also participated. Retrospectively, too, ex-CIA officers published books, both fictional and non-fictional, with the goal of defending, or less often condemning, espionage practices and strategies.[4] The book foregrounds these various stories, examining the adventure tales that shaped the CIA and its officials and informed every step of CIA practice, as well as the tales the officers told outside and after their intelligence careers.

As the book's subtitle suggests, the defining feature of the stories the CIA told itself and the world was imperialism. Archetypal tales of empire and adventure by Rudyard Kipling and T.E. Lawrence were not only read but loved by key figures in the CIA: both Iran coup architect Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt and Russian double agent Kim Philby took their nicknames from the spy-protagonist of Kipling's genre-defining 1901 novel.[5] But as Wilford points out, many CIA officers thrilled to imperial stories while resolving not to be like the British empire, and not to be imperialist, in their own espionage work. Despite this resolve, imperialist stories shaped the CIA's practices. Wilford shows how these stories' attendant orientalism inflected even the agency's seemingly neutral intelligence-gathering strategies, as well as how orientalism and imperialism facilitated the easy slide, in the agency's early years, from intelligence gathering and analysis into more aggressive regime change and counterinsurgency measures.

This imperialism in practice secured US hegemony in the global South just as the Third World was finally freeing itself from European colonialism. But if it was at heart an attempt to control the world and its resources, US Cold War empire often expressed and secured itself, as Wilford vividly shows, through intimate homosocial ties between CIA officers and anti-Communist Third World agents and leaders. This is particularly true in the case of advertising executive-turned counterinsurgency expert Edward Lansdale, who formed affectionate bonds with both Filipino President Ramon Magsaysay and South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem (110-135). Wilford also attends to the masculine bonds and fantasies of lesser-

[4] Among the books Wilford discusses are Ray Cline, *The CIA: Reality vs. Myth* (Acropolis Books, 1976) and Cord Meyer, *Facing Reality: From World Federalism to the CIA* (Harper & Row, 1980).
[5] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Macmillan, 1901). T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (Anchor: 1991 [1926]).

known officers, pointing out that some likened the process of recruiting agents to seduction or orgasm, while many others expressed admiration and even love for agents willing to betray their countries (56). Wilford's attention to both these close emotional relationships and the masculine-adventure frame in which these relationships were allowed to take place is a strength of this book; his analysis consistently reminds scholars that even the most straightforward-seeming reports and plans were shaped by the prejudices, attachments, and fantasies of the men who wrote them.

The fascinating second half of the book narrates the domestic challenges to the CIA's imperial action, culminating in the 1970s downfall of modernist poet-turned-counterintelligence chief James Angleton after the exposure of his massive domestic program targeting leftist and antiwar groups. After Angleton's disgrace, the CIA experienced a "humbling" in the culture at large and Congress passed a spate of new regulations meant to rein in the agency's activities (179-184). The CIA attempted to fight back, chiefly through a massive publicity campaign which, among other things, called on retired officials to defend the agency's image through agency-curated stories. In practice, however, many of the retirees' stories were less than compelling, and some, like Kim Roosevelt's swashbuckling tale of the 1953 Iran coup which came out in 1980, were comically ill timed.[6] If the CIA did not entirely rehabilitate its image through its ex-officers' literary efforts, it did succeed in rolling back Congress's regulations during the Reagan era. The epilogue of the book locates a similar CIA rehabilitation effort in the CIA's war-on-terror era publicity, focusing on Kathryn Bigelow's pro-torture film *Zero Dark Thirty* (298-300).[7]

The beliefs, emotions, and attachments of CIA officers are newer territory for historical study than geostrategic imperatives, and Wilford's emphasis on the personal makes for an absorbing read. At times, however, the focus on narratives, anecdotes, and exploits sometimes seems unbalanced by a sense of the massive harm done in the world by US covert empire. From the Cold War, in which researchers estimate 180,000 war-related deaths a year from 1950 to 1989, to the War on Terror, in which an estimated 4.5-4.7 million people have been killed and least 38 million displaced, these masculine adventures have had cataclysmic consequences.[8] In Guatemala alone, hundreds of thousands of people were massacred and disappeared by the end of the string of military dictators that followed the CIA's 1954 "tremendous Cold War victory" (194). Providing a greater sense of the tremendous devastation caused by the agency might have better contextualized the CIA's swashbuckling stories, especially for a popular audience.

At other times, the book appears to approach these intelligence officers' anti-imperialist ideal, and perhaps also the Cold War itself, a bit too credulously. In his book on British spy novels, Michael Denning calls the Cold War spy novel "the cover story of an era of decolonization."[9] This was also true of the Cold War itself. Recent historical scholarship that follows this line of thinking has begun to de-emphasize the Cold War,

[6] Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for the Control of Iran* (McGraw-Hill, 1979).
[7] Kathryn Bigelow, dir., *Zero Dark Thirty* (Universal, 2012).
[8] See Joshua S. Goldstein, "World Peace Could be Closer than you Think," *Foreign Policy* 188 (September/October 2011) 53; "Costs of War," Watson Institute, 2024, https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/figures.
[9] Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 92.

positioning it as one tactic among others to protect capitalist and ruling-class interests from the democratizing forces unleashed by decolonization.[10] The United States, in this telling, used the Cold War frame as a strategy to access the world's resources after decolonization and to re-consolidate the "free trade" regime previously imposed by the British Empire (75-76).

While sharing much with Wilford's book, the perspective from this body of scholarship would invite a different interpretation of the motives and behaviours of CIA actors. *The CIA: An Imperial History* contends that Cold War spies might have done their intelligence-gathering jobs better if they had not been so driven by the imperialist ideas that defined their pleasure reading and shaped their social scenes. Most importantly, Wilford argues, imperialism drove the idea that global-South societies were being controlled by the Soviet Union rather than pursuing their own paths to self-determination, and CIA officers were thus constantly seeing Soviet officials where they did not exist. But were these officers actually taken in by orientalism-stoked Cold War fears? Or did the US imperial ruling class, in a final twist, perform its constant suspicion that the Soviets were everywhere in order to secure successfully its own hegemony, with little regard for the staggering collateral damage? Returning for a moment to the Pentagon Papers, it is worth recalling that they revealed that the United States had known since the dawn of the Cold War that Soviet leaders had no designs on Vietnam, suggesting not idealistic naivete among US intelligence officers but rather their deliberate manufacturing of Soviet presence.[11]

Of course, the Cold War, like every other war, featured a combination of cynicism and true belief, calculation and sincere feeling. *The CIA: An Imperial History* reveals these combinations, connecting elite and intellectual structures of feeling to geopolitics in a new way. In so doing, the book forces readers to confront the entanglement of literary, elite university, imperial intelligence, and war propaganda worlds, which persists to this day in the United States. Universities, in Wilford's telling, were important locations for inculcating "the ideals of imperial manhood" in future CIA officers, but also for nurturing the "anti-imperial impulse in American life" that "came roaring back" in the 1960s and 1970s (8, 60). As such, one way of understanding the recent vicious crackdowns on students protesting Israel's US-backed onslaught against Palestinian civilians in Gaza, which echo the crackdowns of the 1960s, is that there is a certain kind of imperialist training that for the American political class is meant to constitute an education, particularly

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[10] Quinn Slobodian argues that viewed from the vantage point of neoliberalism's triumph, "the Cold War was secondary to the war against the Global New Deal." Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 2. For other relatively recent books about the Cold War era that de-emphasize the Cold War frame, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019) and Amy Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

[11] See Elizabeth Becker, "The Secrets and Lies of the Vietnam War, Exposed in One Epic Document," *New York Times*, 9 June 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/09/us/pentagon-papers-vietnam-war.html. Kenneth Osgood details the attempts to advance the idea of "Red colonialism" by propaganda specialists in the 1950s, which, at least in the Third World, were largely unsuccessful. Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (University Press of Kansas, 2006), 125.

in the elite universities from which CIA officers were for so long recruited. While elite university students are no longer trained to fall in love with imperialist adventure stories, they are still initiated into a milieu that encourages them to impose their will on the rest of the world, and to imagine that the lives of people around the world opposing US empire do not matter as much as their own. The size of recent campus protests suggests that these universities are now failing at their imperial project, providing some measure of hope that the imperial structures Wilford describes will not last forever.

Review by Stuart Schrader, Johns Hopkins University

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is a product of empire as well as its catalyst. This is the modest reframing of the well-known history of a well-known institution that Hugh Wilford offers, with significant implications for the history of US foreign relations and intelligence. Notably, Wilford argues that by understanding the CIA as an imperial agency, it is possible to explain more clearly why its operations so readily "boomerang" home to spawn repression and state violence, as well as paranoia, thus distorting and undermining the liberal democracy the agency is supposed to be charged with protecting (148-150).[1] If a counterargument to claims that the United States became an empire in the twentieth century has been the independence, novelty, and newness of its major institutions of national security, then Wilford's elegant demonstration of how deeply other colonial empires, particularly the British, influenced the early CIA should finally bury this spurious protestation. Although many key figures in the CIA's top echelons were anxious about replicating colonialism in part because they had experienced it first-hand, Wilford further elucidates how they nevertheless misled themselves about how their actions embodied imperial practices and inheritances. Overall, Wilford's "imperial history" of the CIA is well-written, readable, and convincing. It should become a standard synthetic history of the agency. And to the degree that it represents a history of US foreign-relations that attempts to weave foreign and domestic spheres together analytically, it marks a positive step forward for the field.

The CIA: An Imperial History prompts three questions of methodology. The first question concerns the persistent challenges of writing about the CIA, which can help explain why it has unfortunately taken until the present for an author to make what should be a relatively obvious argument about the CIA and empire. The second, related, question hinges on the benefits and drawbacks of the form of Wilford's book, which uses relatively well-known "representative" figures in the history of the CIA to carry its key themes (7). Finally, what does this study leave out?

The CIA's primary responsibility is collecting and digesting intelligence, but it is far more well-known for its operations, largely covert action, abroad. Covert action is usually where critics of the CIA begin, and it is the most obvious place to look for imperial enactments. But Wilford begins with intelligence collection, highlighting how chief of the CIA's Office of National Estimates Sherman Kent, a trained academic historian, oversaw the promulgation of intelligence estimates using a scientistic approach. Kent rejected the belief, which was cultivated by his British counterparts and predecessors, that intelligence was an art (35-40). Yet in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where the Cold War contest was the sharpest, the sophisticated technological intelligence-gathering techniques that lent themselves to Kent's science-adjacent intelligence approach were of little use.[2]

[1] The "boomerang effect" of colonialism was canonized by Aimé Césaire, trans. Joan Pinkham, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review Press, 2000 [1950]) and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian, 1951).

[2] Wilford does not situate this debate within larger epistemological debates about strategy, international relations, or social science more generally. The art-science binary itself, and the agency's overweening confidence in the more

Wilford argues, instead, that for espionage in these regions "HUMINT" or human intelligence "reigned" (56). But the "misapprehensions" and capacity deficits that colonialism produced, along with cultural and linguistic ignorance, misogyny, racism, and ideological blind spots that were of the United States' own making, meant that human-to-human espionage often fell short (63). With inadequate information, not only did secret manipulation of politics in the Third World frequently fail (in part because the clients and sources both had their own agendas and were unrepresentative), but the crutches of covert action and propaganda became even more alluring. In other words, the consequences were huge. But Kent's failure to predict what became the Cuban Missile Crisis also indicates that "TECHINT," or technological intelligence, fared little better in this theater. Might it have been any other way? Historians are at a disadvantage because of the agency's reluctance to share many of its archival records that get into these granular issues on either the analysis side or the operations side.

But why is it, even with limited access to agency records, that the imperial character of the agency has not been a primary topic in the historiography?[3] Wilford repeats, with mild skepticism, the oft-invoked agency claim that intelligence failures are widely recounted, while intelligence successes remain unknown (61). With this chestnut, one is thrust into the very world of shadows and belief—more art than science—that the agency has generated. The many, cascading failures of the CIA are better represented in the literature than the supposed successes, which can ironically support the claim that the United States has not acted imperially. After all, CIA-staged coups and covert actions frequently did not result in clear and legitimate gains that extended and consolidated US global power. And is it possible that there is a more hidden non-imperial history of intelligence in records that remain under lock and key? What are historians supposed to do? The most unreconstructed empiricist simply wishes for more data, more archival access.

But Wilford indicates why even more access would not show a different history. The argument that intelligence successes must remain secret rests on the notion that the only way to repeat these successes and build upon them is for them to be replicable, meaning that the sources and methods must remain uncompromised. Yet the agency says: trust us, and you cannot verify. Worse, the history of covert action also demonstrates a reliance on similar beliefs in replicability, most famously, as Nick Cullather has shown, the idea that the 1954 coup in Guatemala provided a blueprint for successfully overthrowing other

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quantitatively oriented, predictive, and science-like approach, also became hegemonic in Pentagon-funded think tanks like RAND Corporation and in sociology, political science, and other disciplines in US academia. See, for example, George Steinmetz, ed., *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others* (Duke University Press, 2005).

[3] Of course, there are important exceptions, such as Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of US Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (University of California Press, 2013). On the imperial as a useful category for US foreign-relations history, the key text is, Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World" *American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011): 1348-1391. See also Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2019) and Stuart Schrader, "Imperialism After Empire" *Boston Review*, 29 March 2019, https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/stuart-schrader-empire/.

governments, like Cuba's.[4] The most unreconstructed anti-positivist, however, simply does not believe that events are replicable or unfold strictly according to predictable parameters, except in the broadest ways. Events occur in time, over a chronology that makes prior events affect later ones.[5] CIA analysts know this. The agency's operational stewards, on the other hand, wish to control one aspect: maintaining secrecy to prevent disclosure of sources and methods from affecting future operations. But this approach also denies a key aspect of chronology: the colonial inheritance of HUMINT that Wilford examines, which infused the agency's culture, techniques, and goals on both sides of the analysis/operations divide. Charitably assuming that future historians may gain greater access to intelligence products, a worthwhile analytic and interpretive goal would be to thematize and detail the ways that intelligence analysis, not just covert action, has been imperial, as Wilford suggests.

The lack of access to agency records presents another challenge to historians: how can anyone say something new? Wilford focuses on particular individuals in the agency's history, all of whom are well-known: Kent; Kermit "Kim" Roosevelt, a CIA officer stationed in the Middle East; Edward Lansdale, an officer posted primarily in the Philippines and South Vietnam; chief of counterintelligence James Jesus Angleton; and Cord Meyer, an officer who ended his long career as CIA station chief in London. By focusing on these key figures, rather than more obscure or low-ranking individuals, Wilford bolsters the argument that the agency learned from the European colonial empires and adopted imperial practices of statecraft. These men embodied this two-sided imperial character. But those who are familiar with the history of the CIA already know much of what he recounts, even if Wilford adequately and admirably reframes the familiar through the lens of empire.[6] Beyond the familiarity of these figures, relying on these characters to narrativize particular themes—Kent, intelligence; Roosevelt, coups; Lansdale, counterinsurgency; Angleton, counterintelligence; Meyer, propaganda—raises another question of the craft of writing history.

In the study of fictional literature, particularly historical fiction, to condense a massive field of study into a rough heuristic, characters might be archetypes of social categories; characters might be sites of colliding contradictory social processes; or they might be unconscious bearers of impersonal social forces.[7] To

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[4] Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The CIA's Classified Account of Its Operations in Guatemala, 1952–1954* (Stanford University Press, 2006 [1999]).

[5] This is a somewhat basic distillation of a key argument of William J. Sewell, Jr., "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology," in *Logics of History* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 81-151.

[6] By putting its officers under other agency cover overseas, the CIA has made it difficult for historians to figure out where the CIA's imperatives end and the imperatives of other agencies begin. But this may be the wrong question to ask.

[7] I am grateful to Greg Grandin for conversations on this; apologies to Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, and Louis Althusser, respectively, for simplifying their summa; Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*, trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett (Methuen, 2005 [1928]); Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah Mitchell and Stanley Mitchell (University of Nebraska Press, 1983); Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewser (New Left Books, 1970). For a stimulating, if somewhat unresolved, debate on Althusser's use of "träger," or bearer, as

Wilford's credit, the CIA figures that he examines come across frequently as all three. After all, he is dealing with the messiness of history, not producing fiction. To take Lansdale as an example: he is an archetype of Americanism in the sense of the naïve belief in the limitlessness of the American project; he embodies contradictions because of his anticolonialism even as he manipulated politics and enacted forms of coercion in other sovereign countries; and he professed his (American) innocence while engaging in imperial practices, believing he was a mere bearer of forces far beyond his control. Historians nowadays generally avoid the latter approach, though it can be a high-risk/high-reward strategy, while resisting the creation of archetypes, which can be flat and static.[8] Historians instead focus on the agency and fallibility of individuals, as well as the contingency of events, pushing social forces and structures far into the background or disavowing them entirely. Wilford manages to avoid this pitfall. "The reason," Wilford writes, "for the inability of these CIA legends to transcend the imperial past lay partly in historical forces beyond their control" (306).

For all of Wilford's key characters, however, history nevertheless passed them by. This is the book's change-over-time narrative, along with the boomerang effects of racism and repression at home that follow from imperial action abroad. But the characters do not change much. Their ways and mentalities became obsolete as the world shifted, including through the success of decolonization and the weakening of the global Communist movement (to which they all contributed). The important questions that the focus on these individuals raises are whether they remained static as the world changed, how their role in this change should be explained, and, if the world changed but the United States remained an empire, how it is possible to explain this persistence even as these individuals departed the scene. Do intelligence, counterintelligence, propaganda, and so on still serve the same purposes today? And are there characters that embody them in a post–Cold War CIA?

The book's lengthy epilogue attempts to answer these questions, focusing on figures like directors of Central Intelligence (DCIs) Gina Haspel and David Petraeus, emphasizing the "continuities and correspondences between the War on Terror and prior imperial history" (283). Perhaps due to the paucity of recent archival records to draw upon, Wilford turns these figures into clear bearers of extant imperial structures.[9] Their career successes were largely disasters for the United States, and their choices only

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a linchpin analytic tool, see Kyle Baasch, "The Theatre of Economic Categories: Rediscovering *Capital* in the Late 1960s" *Radical Philosophy* 208 (Autumn 2020): 18-32; Asad Haider, "The Human Mask" *Radical Philosophy* 210 (Summer 2021): 117-122.

[8] See, for instance, Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (Metropolitan, 2019). Surprisingly, however, it is possible to see Max Boot's recent celebratory biography of Lansdale as taking this approach, though inverting the politics of what is ordinarily presumed to be a Marxian analytic. Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (New York: Liveright, 2018); Schrader, "Another White Man's Burden" *Public Books*, 16 October 2018, https://www.publicbooks.org/another-white-mans-burden/.

[9] It must be noted, however, that Wilford draws largely, though not exclusively, on published sources and secondary literature throughout the book.

accelerated its declining hegemony and weakened its national security.[10] The question, then, is whether the underlying unique persona of a Kent or an Angleton, each of whom had an idiosyncratic, if nevertheless elite, upbringing, shaped the forces that their institutional positions nevertheless condensed and expressed, or if the underlying biography mattered little because the forces were so powerful. Did ambition and ingenuity, which all of Wilford's figures had in spades, actually matter? Would there have been a CIA as we know it without Angleton? Probably not, Wilford seems to suggest. The comparison of the first generation of CIA figures populating the first several chapters of the book to figures like Haspel and Petraeus is thought-provoking in this light. Each person was highly ambitious, and their careers depended on how easily they could mold that ambition to the requirements of empire. But they are powerless amid forces far larger than them, and their personal proclivities are fairly uninteresting and unimportant (except insofar as, in Petraeus's case, they torpedoed his career). Would there have been a torture scandal without Haspel? Probably yes, the suggestion seems to be. The imperial past loomed too large.

Finally, beyond the archival limitations imposed by a metastatic and malignant classification regime, I wonder what this book leaves out. It is not as simple as adding more characters. But the idea that the history of intelligence stops at the gates of Langley is unsustainable. As mentioned, Wilford is to be commended for not allowing the history of the CIA to remain outside the United States. Beyond political repression, he takes seriously the deleterious domestic consequences of empowering an agency that runs on paranoia. He offers an insightful interpretation of the CIA's own role in the propagation of conspiracy theorizing as a mode of politics, even as conspiracy theories often put an all-powerful CIA at their center. The CIA objection to critiques (and conspiracy theories) is often that the Agency merely works at the behest of the president, as if it has no internal culture and interests. But sometimes it responds simply: you have blamed the wrong agency![11] And it is certainly true that even before the creation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to supervise eighteen intelligence bureaucracies, the CIA was not the only intelligence/counterintelligence agency on the field, even if it was the one with the highest prestige, longest leash, and greatest power and influence in the White House.

It is probably impossible for any single author or single book to take into account the overlapping histories of military intelligence and signals intelligence, let alone the Federal Bureau of Investigation, alongside the CIA's history (not to mention the intelligence branches within more recent police-like agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration or the Department of Homeland Security). But one wonders if a key aspect of what makes the United States unique as an empire is the sheer magnitude and redundancy of its national security apparatus, rather than the somewhat quaint curio of the mid-twentieth century upper-crust boy's club that was the CIA at the height of its powers. What enabled CIA abuses during the Cold

[10] For a consonant analysis of foreign-policy failure spread over decades and its domestic reverberations, though without as full-throated recourse to the category of empire, see, Osamah F. Khalil, *A World of Enemies: America's Wars at Home and Abroad from Kennedy to Biden* (Harvard University Press, 2024).
[11] John Ehrman, "Intelligence in Public Literature: *Covert Capital*," *Studies in Intelligence* 58:2 (June 2014), np, https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/studies-in-intelligence/volume-58-no-2/covert-capital-landscapes-of-denial-and-the-making-of-us-empire-in-the-suburbs-of-northern-virginia/.

War is manifestly different from what enables them today. Then, they were largely the product of the particular dispositions of figures that Wilford examines, including the fear-induced and racist misunderstanding of the Communist movement that prevailed. Today, fear and racism still reign, but state capacity is so much larger. There is simply no way for any individual or even the ever-growing National Security Council to know all the activities and operations that go on in the name of national security, even leaving aside the petty rivalries and jealousies that the ODNI was supposed to transcend. The varying agencies lurch forward, issue annual budget requests, and hope that when somebody inevitably screws up, it is another agency.

Few would claim that contemporary US foreign policy has any coherence or strategic acumen. This is the result of the end of the Cold War, which organized and gave purpose to the whole affair.[12] The War on Terror, Wilford writes, had "an ambiguous impact on the CIA" (282). Compared to the Cold War, it was a poor sequel that gathered some of the original cast back together. But it ultimately flopped. If the CIA deserves any credit for bringing the Cold War to a close—a gargantuan if—then the chaotic world it haphazardly confronts today, including the turbulent domestic political scene, is its bounty: imperialism in search of dominion. To reuse the words of Virginia Woolf from another, related context: this is our triumph; this is our consolation.[13]

[12] Aziz Rana, "Goodbye, Cold War" *n+1* 30 (Winder 2018), https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-30/politics/goodbye-cold-war/.
[13] Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Harcourt, 1959 [1931]). This novel is largely about the simultaneous unspeakability and omnipresence of empire at home.

Review by Simon Willmetts, Leiden University

For the vast majority of the world's population, who also happen to live in countries targeted by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) covert operations, the idea of the CIA as an imperial institution will come as no surprise. Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister of Ghana and a global voice for anti-imperialism and decolonization, identified the CIA in 1965 as a principal mechanism of neo-colonialism.[1] In 1961, a month prior to the CIA's disastrous attempt to overthrow his regime at the Bay of Pigs, Cuban President Fidel Castro denounced "this Yankee Central Intelligence Agency" as the assassins of "the imperialist government of the United States."[2] After the Bay of Pigs failure, Castro returned to this theme repeatedly in his speeches. In India, one CIA officer who had served there during the early 1970s remarked that according to India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, "CIA agents…were to be found… beneath every charpoy and behind every neem tree."[3] Denouncing the CIA as an agent of imperialism was also a favourite line of Soviet propagandists. Anyone living within the Soviet orbit who regularly read the newspaper would have been exposed to the idea that the US Central Intelligence Agency was the vanguard of the imperialist United States.[4] Even within the United States a number of influential books have cast the CIA, in the words of Chalmers Johnson, as the "spear-carrier for empire."[5] Colour in the nations on a world map that have been staging grounds for CIA covert operations, and it will quickly become apparent that this map closely resembles the imperial atlases produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that were designed to show the extent of European empires.

And yet, it is a testament to the strength of imperial denial in the United States that the historiography on the CIA, at least within the Anglo-Saxon academy, has tended to ignore these imperial legacies in favour of a different story, which goes something like this: due to its embrace of republican values, including openness and honesty in public life, the United States has, traditionally, been sceptical of spies and secret agencies. The necessities of war forced a reluctant utilitarian response by policymakers, and during the Second World War the CIA's wartime predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), was created. Once Allied victory was secured, President Harry Truman disbanded the OSS. Intelligence was not regarded as 'business as usual' for the United States. Soon, however, another war threatened, described (inaccurately for people living in much of the Global South) as a Cold War, which presented the added

[1] Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (Thomas Nelson, 1965), 240-241.
[2] Fidel Castro speech to the Meeting of the Confederation of Cuban Workers, 8 April 1961, Latin American Network Information Center, 2015, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610304.html
[3] Paul McGarr, '"Quiet Americans in India': The CIA and the Politics of Intelligence in Cold War South Asia," *Diplomatic History*, 38:5 (2014), 1047.
[4] CIA Report on "The Soviet and Communist Bloc Defamation Campaign,", September 1965, CIA Records Search Tool (CREST), CIA-RDP67B00446R000500070009-1, https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP67B00446R000500070009-1.pdf
[5] Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Little Brown, 2000). See also Howard Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military Interventions Since World War II* (Zed Books, 2003); Steven Kinzer, *Overthrow: America's Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq* (Henry Holt, 2006).

jeopardy of potential nuclear annihilation. In 1947, the CIA was created by the National Security Act.[6] Ostensibly, its main purpose was to act as a central clearing house and coordinating analytic node for the sprawling web of US government bureaucracies that conducted intelligence work.

Almost immediately, however, the CIA embraced covert operations as part of its core business, even though the National Security Act failed to explicitly mention them. Critics argue that CIA covert operations, if they were necessary at all, grew dangerously out of control during the so-called "golden age" of CIA covert action in the 1950s and point to disastrous failures, such as the Bay of Pigs operation, to highlight the dangerous hubris inherent in regarding covert action as a substitute for conventional military operations.[7] Defenders argue that covert action, when it was successful, provided an important force multiplier and allowed the United States to combat the Soviet Union in a world where conventional military confrontation might result in nuclear war.[8] Both perspectives, however, tend to write the history of the CIA as a Cold War institution, with its activities defined by the great power contest between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Hugh Wilford's *The CIA: An Imperial History* seeks to decenter this conventional story of the CIA as a Cold War institution, both temporally and geographically. Temporally, he begins the narrative not with the creation of the CIA in 1947, nor with the activities of their wartime predecessor the OSS, the two most common starting points for narrating CIA history. Rather, his opening chapter traces the lives of four iconic figures in the history of "New Imperialism": British writer Rudyard Kipling, French General Hubert Lyautey, British colonel and diplomat T.E. Lawrence, and US Major General Ralph van Deman (2-3). Kipling famously popularized a form of imperial romance epitomized by his poem "The White Man's Burden," which exhorted the United States to colonize the Philippines.[9] His novel *Kim* is widely regarded as the first modern spy novel and made a lasting impression upon many of the CIA's founding generation.[10] Kermit Roosevelt, who masterminded the CIA's covert sponsorship of the Iranian coup in 1953, went by his nickname "Kim," after the eponymous character in Kipling's novel. Allen Dulles, who oversaw the "golden age" of covert action as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) from 1953–1961, carried a tattered copy of *Kim* everywhere he went. It was found on his bedside table when he died.

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[6] 1947 National Security Act, 26 July 1947, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ic-legal-reference-book/national-security-act-of-1947.
[7] Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA and American Democracy*, *Third Edition* (Yale University Press, 2003); Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (Doubleday, 2007).
[8] Roger Z. George, *Intelligence in the National Security Enterprise: An Introduction* (Georgetown University Press, 2020); Michael Warner, "A Matter of Trust: Covert Action Reconsidered," *Studies in Intelligence* 63:4 (2019), 33-41; Rory Cormac, "Disruption and Deniable Interventionism: Explaining the Appeal of Covert Action and Special Forces in Contemporary British Policy," *International Relations* 31:2 (2016), 169-191.
[9] Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *The New York Sun*, 1 February 1899.
[10] Kipling, *Kim* (Macmillan, 1901).

Hubert Lyautey was a French General and colonial administrator who pioneered methods of counterinsurgency that were later adopted by the CIA in the Philippines, Vietnam, Iraq, and elsewhere. These methods included both the violent pacification of local insurgents and the attempt to win "hearts and minds" through the construction of roads, bridges, schools, telegraph lines and other benefits of "civilization" that might ingratiate the local population to the occupying power. In the 1950s, the legendary CIA officer Edward Lansdale embarked on a similar campaign to win "hearts and minds" in the Philippines, and then later, with less success, in Vietnam.[11] More recently, during the United States' occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, these methods became popular once again within the US military and intelligence communities. As Wilford posits, "the whole history of CIA regime maintenance points toward something about the doctrine of counterinsurgency that is rarely acknowledged by those who still advocate for it today: it is imperial through and through" (109).

T.E. Lawrence, of Lawrence of Arabia fame, was another imperial icon who had a devoted following among the CIA's founding generation. Like Kipling, Lawrence helped popularize the romantic idea of imperial adventure. His heroic tales of fighting alongside Bedouin warriors in the Middle East during the First World War inspired later CIA officers who were tasked with enlisting the support of local groups to support their covert campaigns.[12]

Ralph van Deman, the only American in Wilford's list of the CIA's imperial precursors, cut his teeth as a colonial administrator at the turn of the twentieth century in the Philippines. There he helped establish a colonial surveillance state, or what the historian Martin Thomas describes as an "intelligence state," in which colonialism and the surveillance of local populations became co-dependent.[13] Van Deman later implemented many of the techniques he had developed as a colonial administrator in the Philippines in the new Military Intelligence Section, which he helped to establish in 1917. The section was particularly active in Latin America. Their extensive counterintelligence work there was eventually taken over by J. Edgar Hoover's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). During the Second World War, this responsibility passed to the OSS. As Wilford writes, "it is possible to trace a thread of organizational descent from the US colonial occupation of the Philippines to CIA counterintelligence" (31). By starting his story in the age of New Imperialism, Wilford highlights the continuity of attitudes and techniques from the colonial policies of formal empires to the Cold War activities of the CIA. It is a largely successful strategy, drawing into focus the imperial baggage that the CIA perhaps unavoidably inherited when they intervened in former colonies.

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[11] See Edward Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia* (Harper & Row, 1972); Cecil Currey, *Edward Lansdale: The Unquiet American* (Houghton Mifflin, 1988); Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Max Boot, *The Road Not Taken: Edward Lansdale and the American Tragedy in Vietnam* (Liveright, 2018).

[12] T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Jonathan Cape, 1935 [1926]).

[13] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (University of California Press, 2007).

Along with this temporal luxation, Wilford seeks to geographically decenter the history of the CIA. Rather than writing the history of an "epic intelligence war between East and West," as the subtitle of one recent popular history of modern espionage puts it, Wilford locates many of the CIA's most significant activities in the rapidly decolonizing global south.[14] In this he follows a broader trend in Cold War historiography to reconceive the conflict as a truly global and multipolar contest in which the process of decolonization became fundamentally intertwined with Cold War rivalries. Odd Arne Westad, perhaps the most renowned advocate of this perspective, also begins his history of the Cold War at the end of the nineteenth century, arguing that the Cold War was largely fought in battles over decolonization and its aftermath in the Global South.[15] The CIA's covert interventions in Iran, Guatemala, Indonesia, Cuba, Vietnam, and many other places were responses to nationalist movements that asserted independence from their former colonial masters.

The CIA's rationale was that the Agency was acting to prevent these countries from falling into the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, but the CIA achieved this through campaigns of violence and persuasion in places that had only recently declared their independence and viewed US intervention as yet another form of imperial meddling. The British understood the United States' need for a Cold War rationale to legitimize imperial ventures, and so they regularly furnished their American allies with reports of Soviet subterfuge and influence in former colonies where the British might benefit from US intervention.[16] One of those places was Iran, where in 1951 the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh passed legislation to nationalize the British-controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), today renamed as British Petroleum (BP). The British had an imperial interest in Mossadegh's overthrow, so they encouraged the CIA to intervene by emphasizing and exaggerating any intelligence they could find of the Soviets influencing the Mossadegh government.[17]

This example raises an important question that gets to the vital issue of how words such as "empire," "imperialism," and "colonization" are defined. Must empires be self-aware? For the CIA's activities to be deemed "imperial," is it necessary to have evidence showing the CIA acting with imperial intent? For although it is true that the founding generation of CIA officers understood the rhetorical value of framing their activities in the Manichean terms of Cold War orthodoxy, they were nevertheless sincere in their

[14] Calder Walton, *Spies: The Epic Intelligence War Between East and West* (Simon & Shuster, 2023).
[15] Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (Allen Lane, 2017).
[16] Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
[17] David S. Painter and Gregory Brew, *The Struggle for Iran: Oil, Autocracy, and the Cold War, 1951–1954* (University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Ervand Abrahamian, *Oil Crisis in Iran: From Nationalism to Coup d'Etat* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, 2nd ed. (Wiley and Sons, 2008); "New U.S. Documents Confirm British Approached U.S. in 1952 About Ousting Mossadeq," *The National Security Archive*, available online here: https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/iran/2017-08-08/1953-iran-coup-new-us-documents-confirm-british-approached-us-late, accessed 23 September 2024.

belief that CIA operations, including in Iran, were necessary to combat what they regarded as the Soviet Union's malign influence in the world, which they believed represented an existential threat to the United States and liberal democracy everywhere. The CIA's burden, if it was an imperial burden, avoided Kipling's explicitly imperialist overtones, instead masking their foreign interventions with the rhetoric of the Truman Doctrine.[18] Indeed one of the curious features of Wilford's imperial history is that it discusses examples of CIA officers with avowedly anti-imperialist views who nevertheless found themselves in what are described as "imperial situations."

Lansdale, for example, was a fierce critic of colonialism and framed his counterinsurgency techniques as anti-imperialist (5). Of course one only needs to read Chinua Achebe's famous critique of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to understand that it is possible for avowed anti-imperialists to nevertheless perpetuate racist colonial attitudes.[19] Allen Dulles, for example, at the precocious age of just eight years old, published a polemical critique of British imperialism during the Boer War, but nevertheless came to harbour a decidedly orientalist vision of the processes of decolonization that his CIA of the 1950s attempted to disrupt.[20] At a speech to the National War College in 1957, Dulles identified decolonization as inevitable, but nevertheless destabilizing and dangerous to global order. "Despite the reticence of such powers as France to grant independence to their colonial possessions," he told his audience, "we feel that this trend toward withdrawal of colonial authority and privilege is one which is bound to accelerate," with the "we" presumably meant to encompass the views of the CIA.

> "As we have seen in the Middle East and Far East," he warned, "it is a process fraught with danger. These underdeveloped peoples are often naïve; many of them lack the experience to manage their own affairs. Some of them lack the natural physical and cultural unity essential to orderly existence… In this world of change, the US, as a great power, can do much to influence the direction and dimensions of the change."[21]

Perhaps Dulles's burden was not so different from Kipling's after all.

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[18] Under the Truman Doctrine, President Harry S. Truman established that the United States would provide political, military, and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces. See President Harry Truman, Special Message to the Congress on Greece and Turkey, 12 March 1947, John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, eds., The American Presidency Project, University of California - Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-greece-and-turkey-the-truman-doctrine.

[19] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *The Massachusetts Review*, 57:1 (2016), 14-27.

[20] Allen Dulles, *The Boer War: A History* (Gordon Press, 1974).

[21] "Allen Dulles Speech to the National War College," 20 March 1957, in *Series 7: Lectures, Speeches and Talk Notes, 1946-1961*, Allen W. Dulles Papers, Digital Files Series, Princeton University Library, https://findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/MC019-09_c025?onlineToggle=false

Wilford's account of CIA officers with the best of intentions nevertheless acting in an imperial manner in imperial situations recalls William Appleman Williams's contemplation of imperial structure and agency in his introduction to *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. US imperialism, he argued, was:

> Not the result of malice, indifference, or ruthless and predatory exploitation. American leaders were not evil men. They did not conceive and excuse some dreadful conspiracy. Nor were they treacherous hypocrites. They believed deeply in the ideals they proclaimed… [it was for] precisely those reasons, American diplomacy contained the fundamental elements of tragedy. It held within itself… several contradictory truths.[22]

The first was the "truth of American power." The United States "possessed overwhelming power in relation to Cuba," not to mention Iran, Guatemala, Vietnam and elsewhere. The second was the truth that the United States' use of its power in these places "failed to create…a reality that enjoyed any persuasive correlation with the ideals avowed as the objectives of the power. American policy makers did not honor their avowed commitment to the principle of self-determination…" Finally, the third truth was that the United States' use of power in these places encouraged the development of a coalition of groups that demanded social reform, and increasingly opposed US influence in their country. For Williams, these "truths" were left "to develop according to their own logic without modification by men."[23] In other words, imperialism was an impersonal process that had developed a logic of its own, and the imperial "situations" that Wilford describes were an inevitable consequence of the truth of American power in the world, and its effects. Did Williams let the individuals responsible for American empire off the hook too easily?

For Wilford, however, the question of imperialist agency is more complex. Though he writes that "whatever the personal beliefs" of CIA officers, they nevertheless "constantly found themselves in, so to speak, imperial situations," his primary focus is the individual attitudes and beliefs of elite CIA officers (8). In Wilford's telling, imperialism has faces and names. "In part I chose to highlight these individuals," he writes, "simply because I wanted to give a human face to the historical developments I am describing. But I also did so to make a point: that the human factor mattered. CIA officers were not insensate tools of US foreign policy; they were human beings shaped by personal histories of culture, identity, and emotion" (8). The logical corollary of this is that US foreign policy, its imperial foreign policy, was also shaped by those "personal histories of culture, identity, and emotion." Influenced by the collective biographies of, among others, George Herken's *The Georgetown Set* and Robert Dean's *Imperial Brotherhood*, Wilford interlaces a thematic history of what he identifies as the CIA's defining activities, with the personal histories of five major figures in CIA history.[24]

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[22] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (W.W. Norton, 1972), 2-3.
[23] Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 2-3.
[24] Gregg Herken, *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

In chapter 1 he challenges the positivist vision of the CIA's doyen of the scientific approach to intelligence analysis who directed the Agency's Office of National Estimates (ONE), Sherman Kent, by highlighting the role of emotions and cultural prejudices, including his at times orientalist outlook, in the production of the CIA's supposedly objective intelligence assessments (35-68). In chapter 2 he narrates the life of Kermit Roosevelt, who is perhaps the most obviously imperialist character of the book, alongside the history of CIA regime change (69-106). In chapter 3, he identifies Lansdale as the personification of CIA counterinsurgency, or regime maintenance (107-146). In chapter 4, anglophile James Jesus Angleton, the notorious chief of CIA counter-intelligence, who as an adolescent was steeped in the attitudes of the British imperial elite at the English boarding school, Malvern College, is the chosen representative for the history of CIA counterintelligence. Angleton learnt his spy catcher trade from the British during the Second World War, whilst also inheriting, Wilford tentatively suggests, the imperial paranoia that often colored the outlook of Britain's colonial administrators (147-192). In chapter 5, Cord Meyer, who as the Director of the CIA's International Organizations Division was the architect of the CIA's so-called "cultural Cold War," is cast as the embodiment of CIA "publicity," or its public relations and propaganda campaigns to elicit public support, or acquiescence, for the United States' imperial policies (193-238).

Wilford's final chapter, as well as a lengthy epilogue on the CIA during the War on Terror, deploys Hannah Arendt's concept of the "imperial boomerang," to trace some of the domestic consequences of these imperial attitudes and techniques.[25] Surveillance techniques that were developed to monitor and control the imperial hinterland, boomeranged back to the United States in, for example, the CIA's domestic monitoring of anti-war and civil rights movements via their infamous HTLINGUAL (mail intercept operation) and MHCHAOS (infiltration of domestic groups) operations. Imperial paranoia of the Soviet Union's subversion of insurgent groups across the globe helped fuel the political paranoia and the proliferation of conspiracy theories at home in the United States. CIA interventions in places like Cuba, Vietnam, Iran, Laos, and Guatemala resulted in changing the demographics of the United States by exacerbating mass migrations to the US of people living in those countries targeted by CIA operations. Joan Didion's new journalism in *Miami*, and Viet Thanh Nguyen's lightly fictionalized *The Sympathizer*, give a sense of how CIA interventions abroad not only produced migrant populations in the United States, but also fundamentally shaped the political outlook of these communities.[26] In both cases—of anti-Castro Cuban exile communities in *Miami*, and Vietnamese refugees in Los Angeles in *The Sympathizer*—the political outlook turned violent in the form of intimidation and assassination campaigns against those migrants who were deemed disloyal to the anti-Communist cause. Even the landscape of the United States was altered by the CIA's imperial ventures abroad. Andrew Friedman's *Covert Capital*, for example, explores the ways in which the CIA, among other imperial institutions, reshaped Northern Virginia into the metropolitan beltway of empire.[27]

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[25] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian, 1951).
[26] Joan Didion, *Miami* (Simon & Schuster, 1987); Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer: A Novel* (Grove, 2015).
[27] Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of US Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (University of California Press, 2013).

These boomerang effects appear to be relatively large and impersonal processes, albeit with very human consequences. But the imperial boomerang took its toll on the individual careers of the CIA officers that Wilford traces. Kim Roosevelt grew to regret the galvanizing influence of his Iranian coup upon the history of CIA covert operations. "You can't go around overthrowing any government at will," he lamented (103). Lansdale's pioneering counterinsurgency methods, supposedly about winning "hearts and minds," turned brutally repressive in Vietnam, and then later in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Angleton's CIA career was consumed by his own suffocating paranoia of a Soviet "monster plot" that left almost nobody at CIA untouched by his suspicion (159). Meyer resigned in frustration from the CIA in 1977 after a series of public revelations about his role in CIA propaganda campaigns tarnished his reputation. Other CIA imperialists met more tragic ends. Frank Wisner, for example, who oversaw CIA covert operations during the so-called "golden age" as head of the Office for Policy Coordination (OPC), and then as Allen Dulles's successor in 1951 as the Deputy Director of Plans, took his own life in 1965. Although suicide is almost never the result of a single reason, historians and his former colleagues have suggested that his career in charge of CIA "dirty tricks," in particular the failed Hungarian uprising, took its toll on Wisner's mental health.[28]

Wilford's human stories underline his thesis that individual agency mattered in the creation of an imperial CIA as well as its unravelling during moments of scandal and anti-imperial reaction. If, therefore, individual people created the imperial CIA, were those same individuals responsible for its imperial consequences? "By your fruits ye shall be known," not by your disclaimers. A related question is the extent to which individual CIA officers had the capacity to think and act otherwise. In his history of British and French colonial intelligence in the Middle East, Martin Thomas poses the same question. "Was colonial intelligence gathering always doomed to fail because it derived from flawed Western assumptions about Islam?'[29] In Thomas's reading, there is a determinism to Edward Said's concept of orientalism that suggests that colonial intelligence officers and administrators were not able to escape their own cultural backgrounds,[30] and therefore "any historical analysis of imperial intelligence… is bound to reveal more about the cultural milieu of the intelligence gatherers than about the subjects of their reports."[31]

Said does not appear in the main text of Wilford's imperial history, but his influence is apparent. Wilford explores imperialism, for the most part, not via the impersonal processes and relations of power between the hegemonic United States and the victims of its various covert interventions, nor through the lens of the colonized and formerly colonized people themselves, but rather by exploring the imperial attitudes and

[28] Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (Granta, 1999), 426-427; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer* (Harvard University Press, 2008), 49-50.
[29] Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder After 1914* (University of California Press, 2008), 77.
[30] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 2003 [1978]).
[31] Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence*, 77.

beliefs that CIA officers inherited from their cultural and social milieu. Could these individuals have escaped this imperial baggage, or were they destined to create the CIA in the image of empire?

Wilford's book is not a complete imperial history of the CIA, and in his introduction he humbly acknowledges some of the blind-spots and lacunas in his work. His focus is on elites, white male elites, although he foregrounds both the whiteness and their masculinity in his analysis. How one chooses to approach the history of imperialism stems largely from the ways in which one chooses to define it, and the methods one adopts to explore it. Wilford takes a cultural approach, reminiscent of Said's *Orientalism*, which, in the end, is also a study of the cultural values and beliefs of white and mostly male elites.[32] Imperialism, in this telling, resided in the minds of the imperialists. But there are other ways in which one might tell the CIA's imperial history. Not least, as Wilford acknowledges, by exploring the experiences of those on the receiving end of CIA intervention (9). What might a subaltern history of the CIA look like? Yet another, and perhaps the simplest way of understanding imperialism is the acquisition of colonial territory. Historians have tended to understand United States imperialism as an "informal empire," emphasizing their economic and cultural hegemony, and their "Coca-colonization" of the world by promoting free trade and then dominating global markets.[33]

However, Daniel Immerwahr's work serves as a timely reminder that the United States did have quite extensive colonial possessions in the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, Puerto Rico, and elsewhere, and continues to occupy what he describes as a "pointillist" empire of military bases and outposts to this day.[34] Wilford briefly mentions that the most infamous site of CIA "enhanced interrogations" during the War on Terror, Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, was a legacy of the imperial Spanish-American War of 1898 (290-291). There is more to this story. During the War on Terror, the CIA's rendition and interrogation program, its fleet of predator drones, its paramilitary operations, and its worldwide surveillance of digital traces was dependent upon this pointillist empire. The United States' dominance in the field of intelligence and covert operations continues to rely upon these small islands of US colonial territory, and the colonial territory of its allies, as the exiled citizens of Diego Garcia understand all too intimately.[35]

There are other imperial histories of the CIA waiting to be told. Comprehensiveness, is not necessarily the mark of important scholarship. Posing questions that open new and far-reaching ways of thinking about

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[32] Said, *Orientalism*.
[33] Williams, *The Roots of Modern American Empire: A Study of Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (Vintage, 1969); Hideki Kan, *Informal Empire and the Cold War* (Routledge, 2021); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
[34] Daniel Immerwahr, "The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in US History," *Diplomatic History*, 40:3 (2016), 373-391. See also Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux, 2019).
[35] Nitya Labh, "Why Diego Garcia Matters," *Foreign Policy*, 30 May 2024, https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/30/diego-garcia-us-uk-chagos-military-base/.

objects of study always is. In this, Wilford's imperial history of the CIA is an important work of scholarship. There are many articles and books waiting to be written that will build upon, critique, and fill the inevitable lacunae left behind by Wilford's study. And for that, historians of intelligence and US foreign policy can be thankful.

Response by Hugh Wilford, California State University, Long Beach

I want to begin by thanking everyone involved in this roundtable: Diane Labrosse and Daniel Hart at H-Diplo for all their organizational and editorial work, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones for his typical collegiality in agreeing to write the introduction, and the five reviewers for their very thoughtful and stimulating comments about my book. I have long wanted to see more dialogue between historians of America in the World and intelligence historians, and this roundtable seems to me to be a particularly fruitful exchange. I could not be more delighted or grateful.

I will pass over the positive things the reviewers said about my book, welcome though they are, and get straight to the interpretive and methodological issues they raise: the relationship between individual and structure; the historical and geographical sources of post-World War II US imperial behavior; the home-front reverberations of that behavior; Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers' self-awareness as imperialists; and the reasons for previous scholarship's inattention to the imperial traits of the CIA. I will end with some brief remarks about possible future research suggested by the reviews.

Three of the five reviewers (Paul Thomas Chamberlin, Molly Geidel, and Stuart Schrader) raise challenging questions about my narrative strategy of covering the main types of CIA operation (intelligence-gathering, regime change, and regime maintenance) via the lives and careers of individual founding-generation Agency officers. It would be dishonest of me to pretend that this choice was not influenced by a desire to appeal to general as well as scholarly readers, biography being such a perennially popular form of historical writing. But, as the reviewers themselves acknowledge, my approach was also shaped by recent America-in-the-World scholarship concerning the role played by culture, gender, and emotion in the behavior of foreign relations actors, as well as the work of postcolonial scholars such as Ann Laura Stoler on intimate relationships as forms of imperial power.[1] It seemed to me that such factors as homosocial intimacy between male CIA officers and their foreign agents were a key but as yet largely unexplored element in all the major types of Agency operation I was writing about and that the best way of exploring them was through a focus on individuals.

But did I concentrate on individuals so much that I sometimes lost sight of their wider historical context, including the catastrophic damage that the CIA did in the Global South? In each chapter, I tried to toggle between passages of biographical content and coverage of larger, structural developments, shifting the historical scale from micro to macro and back again to convey the interplay between the personal and the political. Perhaps I misjudged the balance in some places (ironically, there were chapters where I feared it was the biographical element that was becoming lost to view!). But I do still think that these individuals

[1] See, for example, the forum on "Gender and Sexuality in American Foreign Relations" in *Diplomatic History* 36:4 (2012): 695-772. See also Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule," in Stephen Howe, ed., *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (Routledge, 2010), 177–194. For an exemplary recent study of gender and intimacy in US Cold War development ideology, see Molly Geidel, *Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

mattered. At least in the early years of the Cold War, a tiny elite—the "imperial brotherhood," as Robert Dean so suggestively called it[2]—exercised a disproportionately huge influence over US foreign relations, as shown by the extraordinary circumstance of a pair of brothers, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles, running both the overt and covert arms of the nation's foreign policy establishment (73-75). CIA officers wielded considerable power in conditions of unprecedented non-accountability, magnifying the historical significance of their personal predilections and foibles. This was true not only overseas but also at home, where individual officers covertly subsidized apparently private citizen groups of their choice and even funded medical experiments on unwitting members of the public.

This is not to revive the hoary canard that the CIA was a rogue elephant, operating outside the control of the rest of the government; indeed, my book contains several examples of presidents telling the Agency to do things it probably would have preferred not to do, such as running a legally dubious surveillance operation on the Anti-Vietnam War movement (MHCHAOS) (151-152). This brings me to Chamberlin's questioning of the wider historical importance of the CIA itself. US imperialism and imperial intelligence predated its 1947 founding, he points out; there was a continental and hemispheric prehistory to post-World War II US adventures in the decolonizing world as well as the European one I recount in my book.

This is an excellent point and one that I hope intelligence historians will develop more fully in the future. But I do not think it necessarily conflicts with my central thesis about the CIA: that the peculiar international environment of the post-World War II era, one which was determined not just by a new global imperial rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union but also by the onset of decolonization in the Global South, demanded that the Americans conceal their overseas interventions by resorting to covert operations, making the Agency the cutting edge of US power in the post-colonial world. This was why, as Simon Willmetts documents so well in his contribution, the inhabitants of post-colonial nations singled out the CIA for special denunciation as the principal instrument of continuing western colonial interference in their affairs.

This was also why the CIA reflected historical influences other than the US conquest of the North American continent or interventionism in Latin America. As the Agency began operating in former European colonies, it absorbed colonial characteristics from its surroundings. The Anglophilic cultural values of its elite leadership cadre strengthened this tendency. The kind of covert imperial order the US constructed in the Cold War Global South was in fact not without precedent. As Priya Satia recounts in her 2008 book, *Spies in Arabia*, the British had already constructed a "covert empire" in the Middle Eastern territories liberated from the Ottomans during World War I.[3]

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[2] Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

[3] Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East* (Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder After 1914* (University of California Press, 2008).

According to Satia, an important reason why Britain used covert methods was to hide its continuing colonialism abroad from citizens at home who had grown skeptical about the financial and moral costs of empire (a consideration that also caused the British government to engage in imperial propaganda campaigns aimed at its own citizenry). This brings me to another of the reviewers' observations, Thomas Field's suggestion that my book pays insufficient attention to long-running CIA political and psychological operations overseas—I assume he is referring here to ventures like the Agency's cultural front organization, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) (209-211)—while overstating their impact on the domestic front, within the US.

Field is right that, for reasons of space and narrative flow, I skimped on the topic of CIA front groups in the first half of the book, the part which is focused on overseas Agency operations. (I rather regretted this, partly because the "cultural Cold War" is an old research interest of mine, and partly because there is an interesting story still to be told about the ways in which US ventures like the CCF interacted with the legacies of prior imperial cultural institutions in the colonial world such as the British Council or Alliance Française.)

But I stand by my decision to devote space to CIA front groups in the second half of the book, the part which deals with the home-front repercussions of the Agency's foreign operations. Like the British earlier in the century, the US government employed covert methods overseas to hide its hand not just from foreign eyes but also from anti-imperial citizens at home in America. Also like the British, it engaged in domestic "publicity" work intended to generate popular support for foreign involvements, including fielding CIA front groups that were devoted to specific regions in the decolonizing world, for example, the organization designed to foster public interest in and sympathy for Arabs and Muslims, the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) (211-214). In this respect, as in many others, the American experience echoed that of imperial European societies, where the effects of empire boomeranged home, blurring the distinction between metropolis and colony. This, it struck me, was an under-examined dimension of CIA front operations, and one worth exploring in a book about the imperial history of the Agency.

Finally, two of the reviewers (Geidel and Willmetts) bring up my treatment of the frequent professions of anti-colonialism made by early CIA officers and the contrast between these and their actual behavior in the post-colonial world. Geidel is skeptical, and finds such statements performative, like much Cold War US anti-communism; Willmetts is more agnostic, settling for some choice examples of the phenomenon—for example, Allen Dulles's contrasting childhood criticisms of the British in Southern Africa and a jarringly orientalist speech he made in 1957—and an extremely well-selected quotation from William Appleman Williams on the tragedy of American diplomacy. He also notes the common pattern of these men's careers ending in bitter personal disappointment and even suicide.[4]

[4] Geidel's well-made point about the literariness of the early CIA brings to mind another aspect of what Willmetts calls the "burden" of first-generation Agency officers: the fact that several of them, such as Cord Meyer, gave up promising literary careers when they embarked on careers of secret government service. One of the ironies of the US

I understand the skepticism. "Cry me a river" would seem a not inappropriate response to sad stories about men who did such egregious harm in the world. But I do still think that anti-colonialism was a sincere and powerful impulse in the early CIA, in part a legacy of the missionary backgrounds from which many first-generation Agency officers hailed. For me, it is this missionary influence (one of the few strands of my narrative that was not much explored by the reviewers) that helps explain the otherwise rather mystifying politics of the Agency front group, AFME, which were a combination of intense support for Arab nationalism and anti-Zionism. Many of the people involved with the organization had links to the US missionary community that had settled in the Middle East during the nineteenth century and subsequently developed strong sympathies for the Arab struggle against European colonialism and opposition to the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine. Even beyond the AFME circle, this was a generation of US government officers for whom, in the first flush of victory in World War II, there truly seemed to be no contradiction between Americanism and anti-colonialism. There is probably still no better portrayal of this optimistic conviction—and the sort of tragic consequences that could flow from it—than the character of the hubristic young CIA officer Alden Pyle in Graham Greene's 1955 Vietnam-set novel *The Quiet American*.[5]

Why, as Schrader asks, have so few previous books on the CIA remarked on its imperial character? The continuing classification of most Agency records and the self-denying nature of American empire are two obvious factors. But there are also more prosaic reasons. As a genre, intelligence history is heavily focused on revelation, sometimes at the cost of larger historical reflection. It is hard to ponder big conceptual questions when you are preoccupied chasing elusive archival smoking guns. Historians of American foreign relations, on the other hand, tend to shy away from the subject either because of the scarcity of records or because of its reputation for attracting, as Field puts it, "cranks and apologists." Wherever the fault lies, this disciplinary divide means that, as Schrader observes, the covert dimension of US foreign relations is under-represented in new histories of America in the World.

So, what might future America-in-the-World scholarship on the CIA look like? Not surprisingly perhaps, given that he has a flair for state-of-the-field surveys, Willmetts offers some helpful pointers.[6] "There are other imperial histories of the CIA waiting to be told," he notes, and he is right. As I explain in the introduction, mine is an imperial rather than a colonial history of CIA, and is focused more on the American metropolis and its imperial agents than the people in the Global South among whom they operated (although, as I also point out, writing even an imperial history of the Agency is impossible without incorporating some colonial agency, whether in the form of local collaboration, resistance, or, as in the US during the 1960s, influence on anti-imperial elements within the metropolis itself). I hope very much that

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"covert empire" was that, unlike Britain and France, which celebrated its imperial heroes publicly, CIA officers were compelled to lead their lives and careers in the shadows. This was an additional reason why, despite the tremendous power they wielded, Agency men tended to see their work for the US government as a burdensome form of personal sacrifice.

[5] Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (Penguin USA, 2004 [1955]).

[6] See, for example, Simon Willmetts, "The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies," *Intelligence and National Security* 34:6 (2019): 800-817.

other historians with the appropriate area expertise and access will do as Willmetts suggests and write colonial, subaltern histories of CIA operations from the perspective of those who were on the receiving end. His other main suggestion, that future historians of the Agency pay more attention to the physical infrastructure of the American covert empire, its territorial bases and communication circuits, is also spot on. I briefly allude at one point to the transimperial pattern of Cold War US intelligence using old imperial "listening posts" such as the British signals base on Cyprus (323). Schrader's observation that, despite my chapter on the subject, there is still much to be written about the imperial history of CIA intelligence as opposed to covert action is also a good one.

Whatever directions new historical scholarship on the subject takes, the CIA itself will likely remain an important instrument of US global power well into the future. Yes, its early Cold War dominance of US intelligence now seems, as Schrader remarks, like a quaint historical artefact compared with the stupendously massive national security apparatus currently in existence, with its eighteen separate agencies, dozens more private contractors, and millions of direct and indirect employees. Field is also right to point out that several of the Agency's early functions have now been delegated to other government departments or non-government organizations. Nonetheless, as shown by its post-Cold War revival as, in the words of Mark Mazzetti, a terrorist "killing machine," the CIA has the capacity to reinvent itself.[7] With the War on Terror still not over—indeed, likely to flare up again due to the spreading war in the Middle East—and new cold wars brewing with peer or near-peer competitors Russia and China, the Agency's combination of intelligence and covert action capabilities will probably remain as useful to US leaders as it has in the past. As I suggest in the final sentence of my book, the imperial history of the CIA is likely not over yet.

[7] Mark Mazzetti, *The Way of the Knife: The CIA, a Secret Army, and a War at the Ends of the Earth* (Penguin, 2013), 4.