The eight papers at hand emerged from a June 2009 Oxford Intelligence Group workshop at Nuffield College, Oxford. Gwilym Hughes’s introduction notes how little we understand of the contribution intelligence made to the Cold War’s management and outcome, in spite of the growing historiography on the topic (755). Hughes also notes an early effort to fill this gap when in 2005 the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies (IDS) arranged an international conference to consider this question (756). At this Oslo conference, Michael Herman and I were invited to assess “the contribution that western intelligence made to the course of events that we now call the Cold War.” We did this and in 2006 the IDS published our papers in a slender volume entitled, Did Intelligence Matter in the Cold War?1 I mention this to reveal an early and continuing interest in this topic not only on my own part but more importantly, on the part of Michael Herman, whose two excellent essays appear in this special issue.

The 2009 Nuffield workshop addressed three questions: first, whether intelligence on either side told truth to power, or something else; second, whether governments listened and to what extent government policy on either side was intelligence-driven; and third,

---

1 Michael Herman, J.Kenneth McDonald, Vojtech Mastny, Did Intelligence Matter in the Cold War? (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2006), 7. Herman suggested in this volume that if a grandchild should ask a retired intelligence practitioner what he did in the Cold War, he might answer, “I helped to tame it and avoid Armageddon (41).”
what the overall effects of this East-West ‘intelligence war’ were and whether these effects made the Cold War hotter or colder (756).²

While the papers in the collection are excellent, three of them are on topics that do not focus on the workshop’s three specific questions concerning what difference, if any, intelligence made in the Cold War. I’ll comment first on these three interesting if somewhat extraneous papers and then consider the remaining papers that respond more directly to the questions posed.

Pete Davies’ paper, “Estimating Soviet Power: The Creation of Britain’s Defence Intelligence Staff 1960-65,” is a careful case study of the complex bureaucratic politics of that staff’s creation. Despite its title, the paper only briefly mentions how Britain estimated Soviet power after this reorganization. The paper recounts in considerable detail how a new integrated intelligence staff finally emerged in 1964 with the amalgamation of the three service departments within a unified Ministry of Defence. We are told at the outset that “From its creation in 1964 until the end of the Cold War the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) was the UK’s national authority on tactical and strategic intelligence on the Soviet Union’s armed forces (818).” The paper does not, however, touch on any difference this organizational change may have made in the Cold War. Since we know that the 1961 creation of a new Defense Intelligence Agency in Robert McNamara’s U.S. Department of Defense did not challenge the CIA’s preeminence in producing National Intelligence Estimates, it would be interesting to know in what ways Britain’s new DIS support for Joint Intelligence Committee estimates strengthened the role of the Ministry of Defence in assessing Soviet power.

Julie Fedor’s fascinating paper, “Chekists Look Back on the Cold War: The Polemical Literature,” is an alarming account of post-Cold War conspiracy theories. Numerous former KGB officers’ memoirs and other writings allege that since the Second World War, western “special services” (mainly American and British) have pressed forward a plot to destroy and humiliate Russia.³ The most common account of this plot, which allegedly continues unabated in the post-Cold War world, is found in the so-called ‘Dulles Plan,’ a mythical secret document that Allen Dulles supposedly presented either to Congress or at a secret meeting in the 1940s or 1950s. Although the document’s text (with some minor variations) has been widely reproduced, circulated and cited in Russia over the past twenty years, Fedor explains that an original source has never been produced or identified. In addition to its murky provenance, Fedor notes that the text’s “outlandishly extravagant style alone betrays it as an obvious forgery (843).” Former KGB officers use the myth of a western plot to create an alternative history that justifies both their role in the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the persecution of the dissidents who, they believe, brought about that

² For the purpose of this review I accept the assumption of these questions that intelligence is principally information provided to government policy-makers. As some of these papers nevertheless reveal, intelligence is actually both information and an organized system for collecting and exploiting it.

³ ‘Chekists’ is the popular Russian generic term for ex-KGB and current security officers (842).
This detailed and well-documented account of widespread Chekist paranoia makes one aware of the large obstacles in Russia’s path towards democracy.

While I found Fedor’s account both fascinating and alarming, I must question the place in this special issue for a paper on ex-KGB officers’ post-Cold War exculpatory myths. It is nonetheless a remarkable account of one of the Cold War’s most disturbing legacies.

Schlomo Shpiro’s “KGB Human Intelligence Operations in Israel 1948-73,” is another sound paper that is perhaps out of place in this collection. It is an engrossing account of the KGB’s spy network in Israel in this period and of the increasingly effective Israeli counter-intelligence efforts to uncover it. In a succession of individual case studies it reveals how crucial diplomatic cover was for the KGB’s initial success in running agents from 1948 until Israel suddenly broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union during the 1967 Six Day War. While clearly not intended to explain the difference intelligence—in this case Soviet espionage in Israel—made in the Cold War, this paper leads us to suspect that the Soviet Union could have found the information these KGB agents collected, especially on Israel’s nuclear weapons program and other military and technological capabilities, to be of considerable value. As the author notes, however, “having information is one thing, turning it into better decisions quite another (885).” More research is needed in still unavailable original sources before one can determine the value of the information the KGB collected in Israel for overall Soviet Middle East policy. Without that assessment, one can only speculate about the difference KGB espionage in Israel from 1948 to 1973 may have made in the Cold War.

Len Scott’s “Intelligence and the Risk of Nuclear War: Able Archer-83 Revisited” is a somewhat sprawling survey of a wide range of speculation and often contradictory evidence concerning NATO’s Able Archer-83 command-post exercise from 2 to 11 November 1983. This regular annual exercise, using only communications capabilities and imaginary forces, was designed to test and rehearse NATO nuclear release procedures. Scott reports that in light of the anticipated arrival later that autumn of NATO’s Pershing II nuclear-armed medium-range ballistic missiles some Soviet officials were “seriously concerned that NATO’s exercise might be designed to mask preparations for a genuine nuclear attack (767).” Since the Pershing missiles were not deployed until well after the command-post exercise, the nuclear threat perceived in the Able Archer-83 exercise is somewhat mystifying (763). Acknowledging that at the time neither Western leaders nor Western publics knew of these ‘events’ (775), Scott also admits that—as his account reveals—the argument for a serious risk of nuclear war rests on “limited and patchy evidence (760).” I find the case that Scott describes for a major Cold War crisis in November 1983 intriguing but ultimately unconvincing. Scott nonetheless concludes “Here was the most powerful and sophisticated intelligence gathering and assessment machinery in the world, but one which may have insufficiently appreciated how its adversary viewed the threat it faced (777).” I suspect that if Western intelligence did not unravel this riddle at the time, it was because there was no riddle to be unraveled.

One expects a thoughtful and systematic paper from John Prados and this essay, “Certainties, Doubts, and Imponderables: Levels of Analysis in the Military Balance,” does
not disappoint. It is an orderly survey of the influence of U.S. intelligence, for better or worse, on American military and foreign policy during the Cold War. While intelligence was a “prime contributor” to the evolution of Cold War military doctrine and planning and influential in the design of conventional weapons systems, the paper finds its role in developing such strategic forces as nuclear-armed missile systems more problematic (780).

In international affairs the influence of U.S. intelligence under a succession of presidents in Cold War crises produced mixed results that the author believes only grew worse as the Cold War wore on. Reviewing the contributions of American diplomacy and intelligence to specific international negotiations, the paper notes marked differences in the receptivity of Cold War presidents to the intelligence they received (784). A special case is made for Richard Nixon who often disregarded intelligence and allowed senior officials to influence intelligence reporting (785). As evidence of the difficulty in speaking truth to power in the Nixon administration, the paper includes a case study of Henry Kissinger’s success in forcing CIA director Richard Helms to distort a key estimate on new missile systems (785, 789). As for “telling truth to power” in general, Prados recognizes that presidents and other senior officials sometimes do not want to hear intelligence that challenges their own policies or preconceptions (789). He considers these occasions to be “immutable dilemmas of intelligence, by no means confined to the Cold War (789).”

Prados believes that the quality of U.S. intelligence reporting declined over the Cold War years, in spite of the great growth in its collection capabilities. Unsure of the cause or causes of this deterioration, he suggests that much more investigation will be needed “to get to the bottom of this conundrum (790).” The paper’s research agenda also suggests the need for a careful study of intelligence reporting on crises and of the military balance aside from nuclear weapons.

In its closing discussion, the paper recognizes not only situations where U.S. intelligence served to make the Cold War hotter, but also a number of occasions where it successfully tamped down tensions. “On balance,” Prados concludes, “for all the defects in the system American policy-makers during the Cold War were much better off for possessing a sophisticated intelligence community (790).”

“Intelligence as Threats and Reassurance” is the first of Michael Herman’s two papers. After declaring the basic truth that “intelligence mattered in the Cold War mainly through governments’ use of the knowledge it produced,” Herman turns to Soviet and Western psychological perceptions of intelligence as both threat and reassurance (791). I found this expansive essay rich in insights but occasionally somewhat difficult to follow. Its central concept, however, is not difficult. With the exception of Soviet and American mutual acceptance of intelligence verification of their strategic arms agreements, Cold War intelligence everywhere increased its own side’s confidence by drawing on the results of its collection activities that alarmed the other side (791-792).

Having established how intelligence in the Cold War was essentially a zero-sum game, determined by East and West intelligence successes and failures, Herman applies this concept to the psychological effects of such threats as espionage and covert action. By
surveying the threats and the fears they provoked on one side, the paper recognizes the reassurance they provided for the other side. The paper examines how far intrusive intelligence collection on one side encouraged the other side’s fears of human and technical spying.

On the other hand, Herman also explains how Soviet-American arms control brought reassurance to both sides. From the 1960s on, the growing confidence of both the Soviets and the West that satellite intelligence and arms control agreements made them less vulnerable to surprise attack did much to ease Cold War tensions.

Despite such notable elements of reassurance, the paper recognizes each side’s continuing fear of “covert, internal attacks,” from such threats as espionage, counter-intelligence, and covert action operations (816). Considering the effects of both threats and reassurance, Herman reaches the unsurprising conclusion that threats proved to be the larger psychological contribution of intelligence to the Cold War. He contends that each side found in its adversary’s intrusive collection the hostility that made the conflict continue. “All in all,” the paper ends, “this psychological effect probably did more to keep the Cold War going than intelligence’s reassurance could do to wind it down (817).”

Herman saves his principal response to the Nuffield workshop’s three questions for his final contribution, “What Difference Did It Make?”

First, as to whether intelligence on either side told truth to power, or something else, Herman argues that the U.S. and its allies over-estimated Soviet military power from the end of the Second World War to the advent of satellite intelligence in the 1960s. This was mostly the result of honest ignorance and error, but the error was often supported by U.S. Air Force advocates who believed that the Soviet Union sought nothing less than eventual world domination (893). Herman explains in various contexts that in the USSR truth was often not an option in reporting on the threat of the West.

Concerning the second questions, as to whether governments listened, and to what extent government policy on either side was intelligence-driven, Herman responds that for ideological and other reasons, Soviet intelligence listened more to the Politburo than vice versa. USSR policy did not ignore its highly professional intelligence organization, but it was far from ‘intelligence-driven.’ As for the West, the development of the CIA’s National Intelligence Estimates, from 1950 onward, was central for U.S. policy on armament development and production. The paper nevertheless makes it clear that the U.S. government was not ‘intelligence driven.’

As to the overall effects of the East-West ‘intelligence war’ for the American side, Herman’s discussion in “Intelligence as Threats and Reassurance” provides his response. “On the Soviet side,” he concludes, “we are still guessing about its intelligence on the West and its effect on the regime” (894).

Herman’s final essay thus leaves us about where we began—very aware of how much more we have to learn about the role of intelligence in the Cold War. I can nonetheless report
that in my view these excellent papers make significant contributions to our understanding of that turbulent era.

**J. Kenneth McDonald**, an ex-Marine and Oxford D.Phil., has been a professor of international affairs at George Washington University, Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the U.S. Naval War College, and Chief Historian of the Central Intelligence Agency. His most recent publications are *US Intelligence Community Reform Studies Since 1947* (co-author with Michael Warner), Washington, DC: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005, and “How Much Did Intelligence Matter in the Cold War?” in *Did Intelligence Matter in the Cold War?* Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2006.