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Rory Cormac. ***Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy.*** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. ISBN: 9780198784593 (hardcover, $27.95).

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Introduction by Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, University of Edinburgh

In recent years, British writers have revived the concern with spying ethics that surfaced in the United States in the wake of the Rockefeller and congressional inquiries of the mid-1970s.[1] Ethical concerns are particularly acute in relation to that self-declared branch of 'intelligence,' covert operations. Rory Cormac and the two reviewers of his book *Disrupt and Deny* dissect other dimensions of the covert operational issue. One such dimension is the question of efficacy. As Paul McGarr notes in his review, British author John le Carré believed that covert operations were "counterproductive." If this was the case—and all three of our participants debate the point –another question arises with special urgency: Why on earth did apparently decent men (very few women were involved) risk their souls by engaging in deceit, disruption, and cold-blooded murder? Rory Cormac's book opens a lively debate on that question.

McGarr takes issue with Cormac's view that covert action was a useful tool of British foreign policy, a sensible way of weakening the UK's adversaries and of buying time so that diplomats could do their job. He draws attention to Cormac's own admission that clandestine operations failed to slow down or disguise British imperial decline. He is more firmly in agreement with, and admiring of, Cormac's account of the bureaucratic wrangling, in Whitehall, between the executives of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and those interested parties, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence. Cormac, he believes, paints a more realistic picture than Le Carré in his novels, and, less surprisingly, Ian Fleming in his. McGarr is critical, however, of Cormac's light-touch approach to issues of oversight and transparency.

For those of us who are interested in the American experience, *Disrupt and Deny* has several passages which are suggestive of comparison. There is a discussion, for example, of the 1950s debate over whether to assassinate Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser (122-4). British reticence over that decision might be compared with the restraint shown by the Eisenhower administration over plans to kill Patrice Lumumba (the Congo), Fidel Castro (Cuba) and others. What tipped the balance, and why have we arrived at today's situation, where both the U.S. and the UK routinely use drones to assassinate political opponents?

Michael Poznansky bases his review on comparisons, including a historiographical comparison. He is not referencing the contributions on the ethics of the subject when he remarks that the British scholarship on covert action lagged behind its U.S. counterpart until the appearance of Cormac's book.

Poznansky is interested in Cormac's handling of the question, why covert operations? He notes our author's contention that one reason has been Britain's desire to hold on to a degree of world power that would otherwise be beyond the reach of its resources. Poznansky also discusses the other reasons Cormac identifies as helping to explain the UK's resort to covert operations. They include the avoidance of three phenomena: Cold War escalation, nationalist backlash, and charges of imperialism. Poznansky has a question, however, about Cormac's methodology: We do not know about all of the UK's covert operations, so how can we draw conclusions based on our knowledge of some, but not all cases? Here, he touches on an essential quality of historical writing—it is based on imperfect evidence, whether or not the historian is writing about secret history.

In another criticism, Posnansky charges that while Cormac asserts that the UK has been more restrained than the U.S. in its use of the dark arts, he does not seek to explain why this was the case. One might ask both of these scholars: how do we know that the UK was more restrained, if we do not know the whole story? Excesses are just what practitioners seek to conceal.

[1] Ernest Lefever and Roy Godson, *The CIA and the American Ethic* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1979); Ross W. Bellaby, *The Ethics of Intelligence: A New Framework* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); David Omand and Mark Phythian, *Principled Spying: The Ethics of Secret Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

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How things change. Once upon a time, the British had the audacity to assert that they could teach the Americans a thing or two about espionage. Today, all the talk is about British shortcomings, and Britain's difficulties in coming to terms with them.

Participants:

Rory Cormac is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a Professor of International Relations at the University of Nottingham, UK. In 2018, he was a Leverhulme International Academic Fellow at Johns Hopkins University in Washington DC. Cormac's research specialises in secret intelligence and covert action, on which he has published widely. He is currently working on two research projects. The first, with Richard Aldrich, traces the relationship between the British monarchy and secret services; the second examines British forgery operations and so-called "black productions" during the Cold War.

Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones is Professor Emeritus of American History at the University of Edinburgh. He is the author of *In Spies We Trust* (Oxford University Press, 2013), a history of Anglo-American intelligence relations, and of histories of the CIA and FBI published by Yale University Press. His latest book, published in 2020, is *The Nazi Spy Ring in America* (Georgetown University Press), which appeared in modified format in the UK as *Ring of Spies* (The History Press).

Paul McGarr is Associate Professor in American Foreign Policy at the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom and author of *The Cold War in South Asia, 1945-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). He is currently writing a book on the history of Anglo-American secret intelligence and security interventions in India and Pakistan.

Michael Poznansky is Assistant Professor of International Affairs and Intelligence Studies in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh. His research has been published or is forthcoming in the *American Journal of Political Science,* the *European Journal of International Relations, International Studies Quarterly,* the *Journal of Global Security Studies,* and the *Journal of Peace Research*. His current book project, *Covert Action in the Shadow of International Law*, examines the role of international law in a state's decision to pursue regime change using covert or overt means.

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Review by Paul McGarr, University of Nottingham

In 1993, following the end of the Cold War, David Cornwell, or John le Carré, as the British author of secret intelligence fiction is more commonly known, was asked in a *Time* magazine interview whether it had all been worth it, and whether British (and American) covert intelligence operations had been productive or counterproductive in preserving national security. Cornwell's response was unequivocal. "I would say it was counterproductive," he argued. "If we had been super wise we would have realized that our resources would have been much better deployed showing ourselves to be constitutionally impeccable and not worrying about [communism]…what espionage looks like now is what it always was: a [Cold War] sideshow got up as a major theatre."[2]

Disrupt and Deny challenges Cornwell's reading of the limited utility of British secret intelligence and covert action capabilities from the beginning of the Cold War to the 'War on Terror.' In his account of the largely elided history of the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and its global operations, Cormac concedes that "not all covert action was successful" and that practitioners of this dark art 'made numerous errors,' many of which resulted in "serious negative consequences in both the short and long term." (15). Nevertheless, the central thrust of arguments advanced by Cormac are broadly supportive of the enduring value of British covert action as a foreign policy tool. From Eastern Europe to Yemen and Indonesia, it is suggested, covert action helped to sap the strength of British adversaries, frustrating and disrupting opponents, and providing time and space for the United Kingdom's diplomats to function more effectively (177). Perhaps. Although, as *Disrupt and Deny* ably demonstrates, more often than not covert action at best failed to avert an inexorable process of post-war British retreat, and served merely to delay and complicate an inevitable process of international retrenchment. Here, Whitehall's ill-judged interventions in Egypt and the wider Middle East in the 1950s, and the ignominious British withdrawal from Aden in 1967, offer salutary examples of covert action failing to sustain outmoded manifestations of imperial hubris. Whether covert action best served the nation's interests by helping a waning British empire to conduct inconsequential, but politically hazardous, anti-Communist operations behind the Iron Curtain, and cling-on to colonial real estate in Africa and Asia, remains up for debate.

In fact, although *Disrupt and Deny* revisits by now well-established stories of British covert operations undertaken in Albania, Iran, Egypt, Syria, Indonesia and, closer to home, in Northern Ireland, its importance lies less in the fresh insights it provides in the realm of operational activity.[3] Here, although Cormac has undertaken exhaustive work in mining archival material in Britain and the United States, continuing restrictions placed on the declassification of intelligence material, and most especially in the United Kingdom, mean that little that is new or surprising emerges in respect of specific covert operations.[4] As an aside, one area where this work, and intelligence studies more broadly, could usefully draw

[2] Walter Isaacson and James Kelly, "We Distorted Our Own Minds: John le Carré," *Time* 142:1, 5 July 1993.

[3] British Cold War covert activity has been addressed extensively elsewhere in, for example, Richard J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (New York: Overlook Press, 2002); Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-1953* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004); Andre Gerolymatos, *Castles Made of Sand: A Century of Anglo-American Espionage and Intervention in the Middle East* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2010); Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds) *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004); Chikara Hashimoto, *The Twilight of the British Empire: British Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in the Middle East, 1948-1963* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Matthew Jones, 'The "Preferred Plan": The Anglo-American Working Group Report on Covert Action in Syria, 1957', *Intelligence and National Security* 19:3 (2004): 401-415; Spencer Mawby, 'The Clandestine Defence of Empire: British Special Operations in Yemen, 1951-1964', *Intelligence and National Security* 17:3 (2002): 105-130; and Christopher Tuck, *Confrontation, Strategy and War Termination: Britain's Conflict with Indonesia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[4] Official histories of British intelligence authored by the late Keith Jeffrey and Christopher Andrew have cast some light on the post-war operations of SIS and MI5. The formers narrative, however, drawing on privileged access to archives that remain off-limits to other researchers, comes to an end in 1949. See, Jeffrey Keith, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service* (London: Bloomsbury,

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methodologically on developments in the field of diplomatic history, lies in the ambition of the archival field work employed. *Disrupt and Deny* is a global story of British intelligence activity. Yet, it is written from an Anglo-centric perspective and draws on British and American material. A necessary methodological leap in intelligence studies, surely, is to link material from the global South with that from the Europe and North America in order to provide a more holistic picture of the impact and perceptions of British (and American) intelligence operations outside the Anglosphere.[5] Such innovation, as international historians that touch on intelligence matters in their work have demonstrated, is now both possible and can prove to be highly revealing.[6]

Rather, the true strength of *Disrupt and Deny*, and the means by which it fully substantiates claims to originality and innovation, lies in the nuanced, finely-grained, and persuasive account that it provides of the bureaucratic workings of the Whitehall intelligence machine. Cormac does an exceptional job of piecing together the often bitter and fractious bureaucratic debates that occurred between the Foreign Office, Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), Ministry of Defence and a host of other governmental departments with a stake in the intelligence great game. Such interactions are hardly redolent of the mythical world inhabited by James Bond. But, like it or not, the evolution of Britain's post-war covert action capabilities was determined in meetings held in dusty committee rooms located at the far reaches of musty and drab Whitehall corridors. In penetrating the byzantine bureaucracy of Britain's secret world, *Disrupt and Deny* succeeds masterfully in charting the rise and fall of intelligence committees and, in so doing, takes the lid off the state architecture that planned, implemented and controlled covert operations. For the first time, such context allows a deeper and more rounded understanding to emerge of the decision-making process that informed British covert interventions from South America to the Sudan.

In a contemporary sense, the significance of the burgeoning covert action relationship established between SIS and special forces within Britain's armed services (principally the Special Air Service and Special Boat Squadron) provides a window through which Cormac deftly assesses the United Kingdom's response to current transnational threats, from terrorism to people trafficking. In this area of British covert activity, tensions between operational effectiveness, accountability, and legality have emerged as a prominent part of the public discourse surrounding intelligence practice following the events of September 11, 2001. While Cormac admirably historicises relations between SIS and Britain's special forces, it would have been interesting and valuable to receive a fuller account of the challenges surrounding openness, transparency, and accountability that sit front and centre of current debates that are focused on intelligence operations.[7] The 1994 Intelligence Services Act effectively insulates SIS officers from judicial scrutiny for activities committed overseas. The British parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee has come under criticism for light-touch oversight of SIS. Incidents of 'blowback,' or the unintended and negative consequences of intelligence activity, and notably that associated with SIS

2010) and Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm: The Official History of the Security Service* (London: Allen Lane, 2009). Moreover, tight control maintained over the release of intelligence records by the British Cabinet Office ensures that material which makes it into the public domain has been carefully selected and weeded, and must be treated with extreme caution. Source material triangulation through reference to oral history interviews and the memoirs of individuals connected to the secret world can, to some degree, assist in assessing the veracity of official records. But, the fact that practitioners and officials connected to intelligence operations have invariably spent a career dedicated to preserving secrecy, and are well practised in the arts of deceit, deception, and misinformation, makes such an undertaking especially challenging.

[5] Some notable and path-breaking work had been undertaken in this area. See, for example, Philip Davies and Kristian Gustafson, *Intelligence Elsewhere: Spies and Espionage outside the Anglosphere* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013).

[6] A notable recent example is, Dina Rezk, *The Arab World and Western Intelligence: Analysing the Middle East, 1956-1981* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

[7] See, for example, Mark Phythian, "'A Very British Institution': The Intelligence and Security Committee and Intelligence Accountability in the United Kingdom," and Ian Leigh, "Intelligence and the Law in the United Kingdom," in Loch K. Johnson ed., *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 640-656 and 699-718.

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involvement in the rendition of Libyan dissidents to the Gaddafi regime, invite questions over whether established mechanisms for monitoring covert action remain fit in the post-Cold War world.

It is a testament to both the ground-breaking originality and the salience of Cormac's engrossing and propitious examination of the British secret world that it points to so many fertile and productive directions for future scholarship. *Disrupt and Deny* is an important book that is certain to become an essential point of departure for scholars and students of secret intelligence and the broader interplay between diplomacy and covert action. In uncovering and forensically interrogating the political and bureaucratic evolution of Britain's intelligence community in a global context, *Disrupt and Deny* offers a valuable and timely corrective to received interpretations of British covert activity during the Cold War and beyond. As Cormac reveals, the secret pursuit of post-war British foreign policy bore little relation to Le Carré's cynical and morally vacuous, yet invariably triumphant imagining, and much less to the glamour and ubiquitous violence evoked by Ian Fleming in his Bond novels.

Above all, when it came to covert operations, as *Disrupt and Deny* illuminates, Britain 'muddled through', expended more time and energy fighting battles in the corridors of Whitehall than it did in the Cold War trenches, and achieved meagre results with limited resources. Which, to come full circle and return to Le Carré, raises a question, which Cormac does not answer entirely satisfactorily: has, and is, British covert action the silver-bullet, the force-multiplier, that plugs a gap between the United Kingdom's national resources and Downing Street's global pretentions? On that particular question, more work remains to be done. *Disrupt and Deny* invariably gives the benefit of the doubt to Britain's intelligence services when assessing operational performance. Others have proved less generous. As one prominent member of SIS commented sardonically when defending Le Carré's portrayal of the Secret Intelligence Service, the writer's seminal work of fiction, *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, recounted "about the only [British] double agent operation that actually worked."[8]

[8] George Kennedy Young quoted in Adam Sisman, *John Le Carré: The Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 416.

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Review by Michael Poznansky, University of Pittsburgh

Rory Cormac's *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* is a *tour de force*. It represents the most comprehensive account of British covert action to date, spanning the end of World War II to the present. After recounting early forays into Greece and Albania in the late-1940s, Cormac traces Britain's secret interventions across the globe during the Cold War from East Germany to Iran, Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, Oman, Afghanistan, Sudan, Brazil, Poland, and beyond. The tools employed in these operations run the gamut. Although propaganda featured most prominently, bribery, sabotage, and assassination made regular appearances. All had a mixed track record. Toward the end of the book, Cormac shows how British covert action has evolved in the so-called 'global war on terror' to include actions like targeted killings and thwarting terrorist plots.

Disrupt and Deny makes numerous contributions to the study of secrecy in world politics. First, the very fact that the book focuses on the United Kingdom is significant in and of itself. Much of the academic literature on the causes and consequences of covert action privileges the United States' experience.[9] There are good reasons for this, including the widespread availability of declassified documents and the sheer historical significance of many of these episodes. Yet, as Cormac rightfully points out, the Central Intelligence Agency is not the only entity that relies on covert action (2). His book complements previous scholarly efforts to study the dynamics of secret interventions in countries other than the United States.[10]

Second, although Cormac is primarily a historian, which is reflected in the book's orientation, international relations scholars will find the argument and evidence interesting and provocative. The theoretically oriented literature on covert action identifies a variety of reasons why leaders might turn to the quiet option. Domestic politics, escalation management, international law, and the fact that covert action is seen as cheap feature prominently.[11] Many, if not all, of these factors show up at some point in *Disrupt and Deny*. Cormac also identifies a handful of other causes of covert action. Some, like Britain's desire to pursue ambitious foreign policy aims despite its somewhat limited power projection capabilities, are unexpected (57). Others, like bureaucratic pulling and hauling (20) and differences in the hawkishness and risk-propensity among senior decision-makers (75-77), are more intuitive.

Disrupt and Deny is bound to be a staple for anyone interested in covert operations and intelligence studies more broadly. It is well-written, engaging, and packed with rich case narratives based on years of meticulous archival research and interviews

[9] Elizabeth E. Anderson, "The Security Dilemma and Covert Action: The Truman Years," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 11:4 (1998): 403-427; Loch K. Johnson, *America's Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Michael F. Joseph and Michael Poznansky, "Media Technology, Covert Action, and the Politics of Exposure," *Journal of Peace Research* 55:3 (2018): 320-335; Lindsey O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Alexandra H. Perina, "Black Holes and Open Secrets: The Impact of Covert Action on International Law," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 53:3 (2015): 507-583; Gregory F. Treverton, *Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987).

[10] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005). For a more recent exception, see Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[11] Austin Carson, "Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War," *International Organization* 70:1 (2016): 103-131; Alexander B. Downes and Mary Lauren Lilley, "Overt Peace, Covert War?: Covert Intervention and the Democratic Peace," *Security Studies* 19:2 (2010): 266-306; David N. Gibbs, "Secrecy and International Relations," *Journal of Peace Research* 32:2 (1995): 213-228; O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*; Michael Poznansky, "Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law," *International Studies Quarterly* 63:1 (2019): 72-84.

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with some of the central actors involved in these decisions. In the remainder of this review, I will focus on several questions and issue areas that would benefit from greater attention, all of which present opportunities for future research on this topic.

First, and most importantly, it would have been useful to see more discussion of the methodological challenges that come with researching secret interventions in the British context. Covert action scholars know all too well the difficulties of studying operations that governments try hard to keep hidden. The frequent lack of access to relevant decision-making documents and heavy redactions in those that are available conspire to prevent outsiders from learning the details of particular cases or, even more problematically, learning about the mere existence of certain episodes. This can create serious issues when it comes to making inferences, especially if the cases that we do not observe or have full details about differ systematically from those which are observable and better documented.

In the context of the United States, media reports, congressional investigations, and declassified documents from the Central Intelligence Agency, State Department, Department of Defense, and National Security Council—especially for the Cold War period—greatly facilitate the study of covert action and reduce concerns that there are lots of cases which scholars have been unintentionally overlooking.[12] This is less apparent when it comes to covert actions the United Kingdom has carried out. The files of the major organizations involved in these operations, including MI6 and British special forces, are closed off from the public (10). None of this is meant to diminish Cormac's impressive efforts to piece together a robust history of British covert action by triangulating available data sources. But the fact remains that there are likely cases we do not currently know about. As Cormac concedes in the concluding chapter, "[t]o make matters worse, numerous successes may not yet have come to light" (279). If there are indeed successes (or failures) which remain hidden from external scrutiny, and the dynamics of these cases differ from those that appear in *Disrupt and Deny*, this may well necessitate a rethinking of some of the book's central claims about the sources and effects of secret meddling.

Second, I would have liked to see a more sustained treatment of how the various causes of covert action Cormac identifies stack up against one another. Which drivers matter most in decision-making and under what conditions? As noted above, *Disrupt and Deny* identifies myriad reasons why British officials turned to the quiet option. In some cases, it was seen as a way for Britain to punch above its weight and offer unique contributions to the Anglo-American relationship (57-58, 128, 220). In other cases, it was a means of managing escalation with the Soviet Union (46, 68, 139, 231), avoiding charges of imperialism (114, 139, 170), and tempering nationalist backlash (111, 252-253). It would have been useful if Cormac had provided some assessment of when one or more of these factors mattered more than the others. Such an exercise is especially important for assessing policy prescriptions.

In this vein, part of the challenge is Cormac's ecumenical approach to covert action as a policy tool. Recent studies on this subject tend to focus on a subset of secret operations, e.g. limited wars[13] and foreign-imposed regime change.[14] *Disrupt and Deny* is not constrained in this way. Instead, the book examines a broad range of covert operations. This is a strength of the project in some respects. It provides readers with a feel for the many kinds of objectives for which British leaders have used this tool. But it also poses challenges. It makes it difficult to tell, for example, whether the appeal of deniability in one issue area travels to others. The book does not provide much guidance in this respect. Exploring whether the rationale for secrecy in the course of a regime change operation is similar (or different) when the goal is merely to destabilize a government or even to prop one up would be useful.

[12] O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*, 1.

[13] Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics*.

[14] O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War*; Poznansky, "Feigning Compliance: Covert Action and International Law."

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Third, I wanted to hear more about one of the most interesting explanations for covert action the book offers, namely the paradox wherein British decision-makers seemingly use "covert means to visibly maintain the status quo" (269). In the concluding chapter, Cormac offers three mechanisms through which this dynamic might operate: (a) it did not matter whether Britain got credit for the objective as long as it was achieved; (b) it satisfied policymakers' innate desire to pursue a global foreign policy; and (c) it signaled Britain's value to the Americans (269-270). Was one of these mechanisms more salient than the others? If so, was this because of variation among different decision-makers? Variation in the objective being pursued? Was it some combination of the two? Moreover, while the first and third mechanisms are straightforward rationalist accounts for the paradox, the second has interesting affinities with constructivist theories of international relations given its appeal to identity and shared sense of purpose. Further exploration of how this identity developed, whether it was uniformly held across the foreign policy establishment, and how it might change in the future is ripe for future research. This question can also be examined cross-nationally.

Finally, I would have liked to see a more conscious comparison of British and American covert action. Although the focus on Britain is one of this book's chief contributions, the absence of any real discussion of the similarities and differences with the United States is a missed opportunity in some respects. Early on in the book, for example, Cormac notes that although "covert action is associated with the Americans… few appreciate that for the UK, a country seemingly in perennial decline from its great power status, covert action has been even more important. The British are just better at keeping it covert" (2). And yet, the remainder of the book does little to substantiate this claim or provide a sense of what factors might account for this phenomenon. Given the risks associated with leaks and unwanted exposure of covert operations, much more could have been made of this point.

Another comparison that could have been more thoroughly interrogated turns on the apparent variation in America's and Britain's disposition toward risk in the covert sphere. Cormac argues that the United Kingdom is generally more cautious in this realm and "has not succumbed to the gung-ho excesses associated with the CIA during the Cold War" (271). While this was not universally true—in Iran, for example, it was the British who initially pressured the U.S. to pursue regime change against Mohammed Mossadeq (96-98)—it seems to enjoy broad support throughout the cases. Apart from pointing out the difference, though, there is not much effort to account for why this is the case. Cormac may well be right that part of the reason for Britain's restraint had to do with a more cautious Foreign Office reigning in the hawks of MI6 and the military. Yet, an equivalent dynamic can be seen in countless U.S. covert operations wherein a cautious State Department tried to put the brakes on their more risk-acceptant counterparts at the Pentagon and CIA.[15] Why did voices of caution usually triumph in Britain but fail in the United States? This is an interesting question that is begging for an answer.

Like all great books, *Disrupt and Deny* raises a number of challenging questions that scholars interested in this subject will surely want to explore moving forward. My aim here was to identify some of them in the context of the importance of Cormac's impressive contribution.

[15] The U.S. intervention in Chile in the early 1970s is a great example of this. See Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File : A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003).

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Response by Rory Cormac, University of Nottingham

I would like to start by thanking both reviewers for taking the time to read my book and engaging with its contents so thoughtfully. I very much appreciate their kind words, especially their agreement that the book provides fertile and productive directions for future scholarship, in International Relations as well as history. Helping to lay foundations for future research by outlining Britain's approach was always a key aim of the project.

Both reviewers offered valid and useful comments which I agree will strengthen understandings of British covert action—and covert action as a tool of foreign policy more broadly.

I will respond first to the issue of method and focus. I agree with Paul McGarr that the book's main contribution lies in the Whitehall level rather than the operational level of analysis. This was a consequence of the limitations highlighted by Michael Poznansky, but was also a deliberate choice. The aim of *Disrupt and Deny* was always to examine how the UK approached covert action at the strategic level. There are already histories of notorious covert actions in Albania and Iran for example;[16] I hoped to bring these together in order to unpack broader British thinking while also adding new operational insights where appropriate. I am glad that McGarr concludes that I achieved this and would note, as an aside, that hundreds of operational files have been released since 2019 so hopefully these will make their way into future editions of the book.

I echo all of Poznansky's suggestions, but see them more as avenues for future research rather than things which should/could have featured in this book. My aim was always more narrow: to unpack a British approach. This is a significant question in itself and one which the literature, which is dominated by CIA activity,[17] had not answered. The book aimed to offer a historical approach rather than a sustained treatment of causes and, as noted above, I very much hope that IR scholars take my historical narrative as evidence to feed into their work on why states choose to use covert action. I take the broader point and could certainly have used the conclusion to weigh the myriad causes alluded to in the book and address the main drivers of British covert action in a more explicit manner. I am not sure, however, that the historical approach offered the best means of sustained comparison of causes throughout.

The same applies to Poznansky's point about comparison with the United States. This is an important avenue for future research, but I feel that it would have been beyond the scope of my book. The aim was more limited: to establish the British approach. Once again, I hope that scholars can build on my case study to offer comparison not just with the U.S. but with other countries too.

The international angle brings us on to McGarr's main criticism: that the approach is too Anglo-centric. This comment is certainly fair and, although the book intended to be a history of UK covert action, it would have been significantly enhanced by looking at more sources from the countries where Britain undertook these activities. Given the close relationship between the two countries I did consult many American archives, but the book would undoubtedly have benefited had I

[16] On Albania see, for example, Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Albert Lulushi, *Operation Valuable Fiend: The CIA's First Paramilitary Strike against the Iron Curtain* (New York: Arcade, 2014). On Iran see Wm Roger Louis, 'Britain and the Overthrow of the Mossadeq Government', in Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds.), *Mohammad Mossadeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004): 126-177; Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: John Wiley, 2008); Ali Rahnema, *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[17] For recent examples of see, Michael Poznansky, *In the Shadow of International Law: Secrecy and Regime Change in the Post-War World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Lyndsey O'Rourke, *Covert Regime Change: America's Secret Cold War* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2018); Austin Carson, *Secret Wars: Covert Conflict in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

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accessed archives elsewhere. This is difficult—although certainly not impossible—for solo research and, once again, I hope that teams of scholars can work together to start to deliver international histories of covert action.

In sum, I hope that this book aids our understanding of British covert action and can then go some way to influence scholarship on state use of covert action more broadly, including international comparisons, as well as broader international histories. Covert action is an important subject and I'm delighted that it continues to get the recognition it deserves.

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