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Spying on the world: the declassified documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013 [book review]

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Richard Aldrich, Rory Cormac and Michael Goodman, *Spying on the World: The Declassified Documents of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-2013*.

Spying on the World focuses on the work of the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) from its inception in 1936 to the current day. The book examines the assessments the JIC has generated and it is emblematic of the relationship between government intelligence and policy. The authors present the key moments in UK intelligence history via the declassified JIC files to highlight the challenges government face in mapping evolving patterns and emerging crises, and then in producing sensible responses to those crises. The authors describe a high-level picture of competence and success whilst demonstrating that there is a great deal of nuance in that historical record. Whilst they set out to show the centrality of the JIC to the machinery of UK intelligence, they note that only recently has the Committee become a public feature of intelligence debate. This book adopts a broadly historical methodology – it is critical of its sources, but it uses them as the primary means to evaluate effectiveness and to describe these relationships. In terms of its coverage, the authors have been guided by what is present in those archives. That archive does, however, cover most of the crises and incidents that the UK has been party to or part of since 1936. There is, therefore, broad coverage of the Cold War (Russia, nuclear non-proliferation, Suez, Vietnam), crises for the UK including Northern Ireland and the Falklands, and within more recent crises involving Iraq and the Syrian Civil War. The book is aimed at intelligence scholars, those with a general interest in contemporary foreign policy history, and it can also be seen as providing a taster for those interested in what intelligence material is held in the archives.

Spying on the World provides a genuinely novel set of historical materials. This book is the first time such a set of materials has been curated, presented and analysed. It is highly likely that Aldrich, Cormac and Goodman will be succeeded by other historians who now enter the JIC archives seeking to build more detailed, but narrower historical constructs based on this material. The book is right to critically evaluate what can be learned and known from an archive exclusively filled with government documents, and the various tensions within historical method are well discussed here. *Spying on the World* is a well written and nicely presented book. The archive material appearing in its original form is a pleasing attention to detail.

(403 words)