

David J. Alvarez, Eduard Maximilian Mark. *Spying through a Glass Darkly: American Espionage against the Soviet Union, 1945-1946.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016. 360 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7006-2192-7.

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In September 1945, President Harry Truman ordered disbandment of the United States' wartime intelligence agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Fearful of an American "Gestapo," and suspicious of the OSS's gregarious leader, William Donovan, Truman quickly turned the page on America's most significant foray into professional intelligence. Two years later, in the midst of a deepening Cold War, Truman recognized the need for a centralized intelligence service to counter the threat posed by the Soviet Union. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was born, resurrected from the smoldering ashes of Donovan's empire. Or so the story goes. David Alvarez and the late Eduard Mark, in their pioneering study, *Spying Through a Glass Darkly*, see it otherwise. There was no void for the CIA to fill in 1947; American espionage after the OSS continued in the immediate postwar period under the unheralded and "surprisingly effective" Strategic Services Unit (SSU).

Well written and informed by deep archival research, *Spying Through a Glass Darkly* is the first account of the operations and activities of the SSU. It sheds light on a time in which most intelligence histories "go dark"—the first year after the war—and seeks to "map" the role of US intelligence in this neglected period (p. xi). After tracing

the origins and limitations of the SSU, and arguing that there was only a slow postwar pivot toward an emerging Soviet threat, Alvarez and Mark illuminate and assess SSU operations in Europe. In doing so, the authors engage a number of important historiographical discussions—on the nature, efficacy, and ideological predispositions of the early intelligence community, and more broadly, on the origins of the Cold War.

Alvarez and Mark argue that the SSU was plagued by limited resources, questionable sources, and lack of guidance from political leaders in Washington, DC, but that it was able to regroup under a leaner structure and exhibit "renewed vitality" in the form of increased operational activity (p. 33). Although the SSU suffered devastating operational failures, the authors believe the organization "performed fairly well" (p. 274), enough to be considered the most effective intelligence organization of the period. They also contend that the SSU enjoyed influence with on-scene officials like US Ambassador to France Jefferson Caffery; as a result, its intelligence likely played an important role in shaping US policy. In contrast to other accounts which view postwar intelligence services as viscerally anticommunist and the United States as having struck the first blows of the Cold War even before the end of the

Second World War, Alvarez and Mark deny that SSU operatives were anticommunist and contend that they only slowly came to view the Soviets as a potential threat in early 1946. Until then, they argue, the organization's interest in the Soviet Union was merely part of a desire for "total intelligence"—worldwide coverage of allies, neutrals, and enemies—and not reflective of deep-seated antagonism. The authors thus implicitly align with more orthodox arguments about the origins of the Cold War; the United States engaged in a Cold War with the Soviets, not out of reflexive anticommunism, but in response to their bad behavior.

As fine-grained as this study is, some judgments overtake the evidence. Even if the SSU only officially pivoted toward a Soviet threat in March 1946, when authorities in Washington adjusted intelligence requirements to reflect Cold War priorities, there is plenty of evidence that SSU operatives and their predecessors (with the notable exception of the OSS Research and Analysis branch) were largely anticommunist in outlook, and, even more importantly, that their sources were, too. The authors acknowledge as much with reference to alarmist field reports warning of communist seizures of power in France and Italy, many of which preceded the end of the war by over a year. Perhaps this was less of a pivot from apathy to concern about a Soviet threat than toward active operations against the Soviets in Europe, a seemingly critical distinction between analysis and operations that is often confused. Certainly perceptions of threat had to precede more operational emphasis on Soviet targets. While the authors also admit that the SSU fell victim to misinformation, they maintain that it was the least "gullible" of the intelligence services (p. 133), a somewhat dubious distinction. By 1948, the CIA privately acknowledged that most of the more hysterical reporting on the communist threat in Europe—much of which had come from the SSU—was not only inaccurate, but the result of troubling engagement with duplicitous sources and intelligence mer-

chants. And while the authors make a compelling case for SSU influence, if for no other reason because its reports enjoyed wide circulation within the US government, it would be a stretch to suggest that the SSU had a role in moderating the views of important officials on the ground in Europe like Ambassador Caffery. Although he did not believe that French communists would resort to violence to seize power, Caffery's views were not particularly moderate; in fact, he ascribed to French communists the same goal as more fantastical SSU reporting—a completely Sovietized France.

As the comments above demonstrate, *Spying Through a Glass Darkly* will generate important debate on the role and efficacy of the SSU. It is a must-read for scholars of American intelligence and the early Cold War.

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