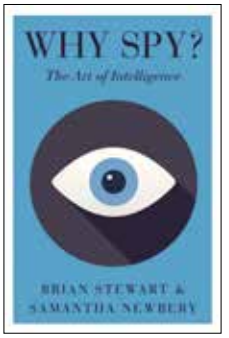
Book Reviews

Why Spy? The Art of Intelligence



By Brian Stewart & Samantha Newbery
Publisher: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd (11 Jun. 2015) (**ISBN-10**: 1849045135) 288 pages

Reviewed by Flight Lieutenant Mark Kennedy

Biography: Flight Lieutenant Mark Kennedy is an RAF Intelligence Officer whose professional experience has been accumulated in the Joint, Coalition and NATO Alliance domains in the UK and on deployments. He is currently undertaking an MA through the University of Salford.

Brian Stewart's 70 years of direct involvement in intelligence as a military officer and subsequently a civil servant, combined with the academic authority of Dr Samantha Newbery, provides valid, real-world insight into how and why a nation engages in espionage. As a lecturer in Contemporary Intelligence Studies at the University of Salford specialising in the intersection between policy-making and ethics, Dr Newbery is ideally placed to have provided the direction and guidance to the development of Stewart's writing. *Why Spy?* is not only an ideal primer for budding intelligence staff, but it should also be digested by policymakers, current intelligence staff and those generally interested in the field of intelligence studies. Only by knowing how and why nations spy can we then understand how political masters are informed and make decisions.

Stewart's lifetime of experience ranged from studying at Oxford prior to attaining his Commission with the Black Watch and subsequently seeing action in Northwest Europe and Malaya. It was during Stewart's time in the Far East as a Colonial Officer that he saw the importance of local-level engagement in developing an intelligence picture. His recollections from his time on the ground highlight the importance, and subsequent success, of a whole of government approach – military, police and branches of government – when fighting insurgency, especially during the Malayan Emergency. Similar insights have been put forward by the former Australian officer and counterinsurgency expert, David Kilcullen, and the same

concepts appeared in the British Army's COIN Field Manual, this time under the guise of a 'unity of effort' approach.

Owing to his tenure some years later as Secretary for the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and Cabinet Office, Stewart is able to provide an understated birds-eye view of intelligence bureaucracy uses, misuses and failures that appear still commonplace today. Stewart articulates how the JIC narrative, developed from the work of such a small committee, can significantly influence government and its decisions on conflict, as well as subsequent foreign policy actions.

The fallacy matter of 'intelligence failure' is regularly visited within the book, to highlight how any error or misjudgement is passed off as a failure of intelligence. Whilst it is politically expedient for policymakers to lay blame on the intelligence community, it is perhaps a matter of politicians' over-reliance on limited intelligence that is the point of failure. Stewart aptly calls intelligence the "profession that provides a conveniently silent scapegoat when there is failure, but cannot be publicly congratulated on success."

This book is written in a style that enables understanding by political outsiders with an interest in national security matters, not just career intelligence professionals. Broken into four parts, the book starts with historical examples of Stewart's exposure to and the importance of intelligence during his time on the ground in the Far East. Part 2 discusses the machinery and methodology of how the art of Intelligence is conducted, with descriptions and insights into the types of intelligence collection such as SIGINT, HUMINT and the unofficial CABINT (the use of taxi drivers as a vital source of information and intelligence in restricted areas such as war and conflict zones). Part 3 discusses cases of intelligence in practice such as Pearl Harbor, The Bay of Pigs and Iraq's WMD, or lack thereof. Finally, Part 4 concludes with an insight into the more clandestine activities such as deception operations, assassinations and the destabilising of governments – activities that rarely reach the media but, when they do, attract a great level of attention.

Stewart's balanced style offers a fascinating account of why intelligence is critical, despite the political risks and potential loss of life. He successfully manages to articulate that intelligence work is an art rather than a collection of processes and procedures that can accurately indicate the future. As Vice Admiral Sir Louis Le Bailly, Stewart's friend and former colleague, reminds us, it is our task to "tell those who would not listen all the things they did not wish to know", a timeless reminder of the difficulty faced by intelligence professionals.