

# The Academy of Political Science

475 Riverside Drive · Suite 1274 · New York, New York 10115-1274  
(212) 870-2500 · FAX: (212) 870-2202 · [aps@psqonline.org](mailto:aps@psqonline.org) · <http://www.psqonline.org>

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## Book Reviews

**America's Strategic Blunders: Intelligence Analysis and National Security Policy, 1936–1991** by Willard C. Matthias. University Park, Penn State University Press, 2001. 367 pp. \$35.00.

This book suffers from two related tensions. One is between the topic given in its title and its subtitle, *Intelligence Analysis and National Security Policy, 1936–1991*. The first implies a focus on policy and decision making, the second on how the intelligence community saw the world. Although the two are related, they are not identical and are difficult to cover in one volume. The second tension is between a work of history and a personal memoir. Matthias, having been a life-long intelligence officer who wrote many important estimates, has not been able to make up his mind what kind of book he wanted to write, and as a result his account is often superficial. It's too arcane for the general reader; it says little to the specialist.

As a history, it is marred by insufficient research and uneven coverage. Its basic argument is that throughout the cold war intelligence reports and policy makers were divided into two camps. One saw the Soviet Union as nasty but essentially defensive and prudent, well aware of American strength and its own internal weaknesses, and often acting most aggressively in response to American moves. The other camp saw the USSR as highly ideological, aware that the West did not threaten it and willing to run high risks in order to expand. Matthias is in the first camp and sees Soviet-American conflict largely as a spiral growing out of fears and misperceptions. Although he draws on some documents from Soviet archives, his account will not be new to scholars; nor will it convince those not already in his camp.

The book comes alive when he draws on his personal experiences to explain splits within the intelligence community, to describe the intelligence processes, and to provide telling details. Matthias is an acute observer of how intelligence was put together and sheds light on a number of key estimates, not only on the USSR but also on Vietnam and other countries. It is nice to know, for example, that when the CIA's head of operations visited its top analytical group in the spring of 1960 and got no support for his view that internal opposition to Castro was widespread, he never probed further or repeated his visit. Unfortunately, Matthias apparently was not involved in many of the key controversies, such as the bomber and missile gaps, the underestimates of the Soviet build-up of the late 1960s, and the infamous

Team B report of 1979. Only the latter is covered, entirely from standard sources. Interestingly enough, Team B's hard-line analysis, which Matthias excoriates, argued that intelligence had gone wrong because it had concentrated on hardware and lost sight of the softer factors of ideology and intentions. Matthias criticizes earlier hawkish estimates for a similar focus on capabilities and a neglect of context and politics.

Matthias usefully excerpts or summarizes many intelligence estimates, especially those that he wrote. His discussion of the pre-Korean War years is particularly interesting, because he can compensate for his lack of first-hand involvement by his knowledge of the changing processes and organizational arrangements, which remain obscure in most histories of the period.

Although he rarely discusses the links between intelligence explicitly, the story he tells is largely one of lack of influence (pp. 51, 56, 73, 79, 92, 138, 195). Even in discussing "the estimate that changed the world," which he wrote in 1964, he can find no instances in which an estimate had a noticeable effect on policy. As his discussion of the increased politicization of intelligence in the 1970s and 1980s makes clear, intelligence seems to have mirrored American policy more than guided it. Perhaps intelligence's most important contribution is one Matthias does not note: it gave policy makers a justified confidence that they would not suddenly face an unexpected Soviet military weapon or military posture, let alone a surprise attack. This was not a minor contribution.

ROBERT JERVIS  
*Columbia University*

**Beyond the Security Dilemma: Ending America's Cold War** by Jason G. Ralph. *Burlington, VT, Ashgate, 2001. 213 pp. \$69.96.*

Security studies has long been dominated by realists who contend the international milieu is one of anarchy and uncertainty, causing states to prioritize protection from military threats through power maximization. This state of affairs creates the security dilemma, a never-ending cycle where states build up their militaries to counter perceived threats, leading other states to respond in like fashion. Jason G. Ralph challenges these assumptions in this post-modern polemic, arguing that the very concept of security is one manufactured by the military and other special interests who "cynically manufacture uncertainty . . . in order to encourage support for their preferred solution" (p. 3).

For Ralph, true security focuses on the individual rather than the state, since any gains in the military security of one state necessarily create a disadvantage for competing states. We must instead think past borders and see "the other as an extension of the self" (p. 108). This can be achieved through a series of confidence-building measures to "reduce suspicion and tension between two