

BOOK REVIEW/RECENSION

**Intelligence as Democratic Statecraft: Accountability and Governance of Civil-Intelligence Relations across the Five Eyes Security Community—the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand**

**Christian Leuprecht and Hayley McNorton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 272**

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At a time in the early 1970s when many Americans (and more than a few others) were expressing mounting misgivings about the Nixon administration's lack of "accountability," Arthur Schlesinger Jr. quoted to effect a remark Thorstein Veblen had made more than a half century earlier. The famous economist had been reflecting on the impact the recently ended Great War had had upon the manner in which democratic governments were handling the challenges posed by the intelligence-gathering responsibilities they had been assuming as a result of the exigencies of the fighting. Veblen was sure of two things, now that the war was over. The first was that because democratic statecraft was increasingly growing "devoted to the gainful pursuit of international intrigue," liberal governments would be forced to conduct more and more of their "ordinary work by night and cloud." The second was that democratic citizenry would be willing, indeed quite happy, to acquiesce in furtiveness on the grounds that secrecy was essential for national security (Schlesinger, 1973: 337).

For a time, it seemed as if Veblen had been correct on both counts. Democratic governments, buffeted by the storms touched off by great-power rivalry during the first half of the dismal twentieth century, were indeed finding themselves forced more and more to work by night and cloud. And, with some notable exceptions, their publics tolerated such furtiveness as the necessary price for security in an ever more dangerous world. Then, starting in the Vietnam era, things began to change. Ever since the 1970s, the decade in which Schlesinger penned his vigorous critique of unrestrained governmental (as in Nixonian) stealth, there has been an ongoing tug of war throughout the democratic world, pitting governments, desirous as they are of attaining as much operational secrecy as they can get away with, against a public whose appetite for acquiescence in secrecy had apparently become satiated. Those publics, henceforth, would demand accountability, and they would refuse—well, some of the time—to take no for an answer.

This continuing tension between the democratic state's need for operational secrecy on the part of its intelligence agencies and the public's insistence upon greater accountability provides the plotline of Leuprecht and McNorton's book. In its pages, they take the reader methodically through an empirically rich inquiry into what they call the "democratic-intelligence paradox." This paradox can best be captured by the oft-repeated homily about entities (and sometimes people) held to be, at one and the same time, both annoying and essential—"can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em."

A great strength of the authors, as they explore this paradox, is their sense of balance. They recognize all too clearly the need for democratic states to be as fully aware as they can possibly be regarding the panoply of threats—external and internal—facing them, yet at the same time

they understand how essential it is for there to be democratic accountability on the part of those charged with the gathering of, and acting upon, intelligence. Hence the book's ambitious mission statement: to "develop a democratic theory of civil-intelligence relations" (4). While the problem of accountability is hardly new in the affairs of states and is not something that applies only to democracies, it remains the case that it is among democracies that the need for accountability looms largest, for obvious reasons stemming from the normative underpinnings of democratic governments: if the public is supposed to be the ultimate source of legitimacy, then it follows that the public has a need to know as much as it can about matters affecting its governance.

Leuprecht and McNorton's quest to develop this "democratic theory" of civil-intelligence relations has them turning to the states that they argue are most capable of yielding a set of best practices for resolving, or at least creatively handling, the paradox. Those states are none other than the Five Eyes announced in the book's subtitle—the select group of countries that gather and share the most sensitive information about their individual and collective threat environments. Those states are, of course, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, a group sometimes alternatively referred to as the Anglosphere (Vucetic, 2011; Haglund, 2022).

The bulk of the book is dedicated to a detailed examination of each country's procedures and institutions for assuring as much accountability as possible, in the circumstances. So detailed is their examination that the authors could be mistaken for having written a repair manual for "fixing" the democratic-intelligence paradox. However, if that is their aim, it remains unclear whether any member of the Five Eyes stands out through its effective prosecution of an "endgame" defined by the goal of ensuring that its intelligence entities "use their powers lawfully, proportionally, and as warranted" (193).

Are there, one is left wondering, really some actionable, or at least discernable, best practices to be gleaned from this stunningly inductive exploration the two authors provide? Does, or can, anyone get it right? Apparently not, at least if we take their word for it. For they tell us that because of the sheer complexity injected by "endogenous" factors (including such hard-to-handle items as "history" and "culture"), it becomes "difficult to zero in on a definitive bottom line of what makes for 'good' intelligence accountability" (202). Yet though that bottom line remains elusive, Leuprecht and McNorton are certain of two things. First, the experience of the Five Eyes shows that states can minimize, though never completely eliminate, the most disturbing consequences inherent in the democratic-intelligence paradox. Second, it is vitally important that they do what they can to minimize those negative consequences, for nothing other than the "future of democracy and democratic legitimation" is at stake (206).

But if they are very like Veblen in knowing two things for certain, they are quite unlike him in the sense of optimism they convey, in contrast to his pessimism. And even if they may not succeed in persuading readers that they really did develop a usable "democratic theory of civil-intelligence relations," they certainly have provided an invaluable vade mecum to all who are curious about how democratic countries might improve the ways in which they collect and act upon intelligence. This book is a model of its kind.

## References

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