

Contribution of Nigel West in the historiography of British Intelligence

Question:

To what extent do the works of Nigel West (aka Rupert Allason) represent a valuable contribution to the historiography of the British intelligence community?

Introduction:

Rupert Allason writes under the pen name Nigel West. He is one of the world's most famous and prolific writer. He has written a lot on the intelligence matters. He has also edited nearly three dozen books on various subjects of intelligence (West,2012). He also lectures at the Centre of Counterintelligence on history of postwar intelligence. He has compiled several volumes of British counterintelligence, naval intelligence, signals intelligence, and cold war intelligence. He was also an elected member for a decade at the British Parliament in London. He has also received an award of "Lifetime Literature Achievement Award" from AFIO (Association of Former Intelligence Officers) (Alluson, 1982). He has also written some excellent history of the British and Russian intelligence operations. This contributed well to the historiography of the British intelligence community. He also wrote a well-reviewed dictionary of British Intelligence.

Importance of his works:

This work done by him is of great importance and contributed well to the historiography of British Intelligence Community. This is important because previously it was a problem for scholars of intelligence that they lacked proper reference works. These works help understand history of British Intelligence community and they are also an excellent primer on post 1939

counterintelligence and intelligence series, events, and personalities. Scholars has been able to take guidance about other unclassified works from West (Johnson, 2007). He in his work has presented well-written summaries and several accounts of intelligence operations. In several sections of his work, services of minor and major powers are also presented. For example, in his work on Cuban services he has provided detailed description on the services, their background and their accounts (Barbier, 2008). The section written on the CIA's penetration of the GRU, and on General Polyakov is of great importance as well. The detailed bibliographies presented in his works holds great importance as one can have an idea about several English Literature books on all the entries (West,2012). This work could be improved if he had added more important works related and in languages like German, French, and Russian.

Works and Contributions:

In his article "Venona"-what we really knew during the cold war, he talks about the importance of Venona and that if offered the FBI and the Armed forces security agency an insight into the methods set my Soviet Operational and what were the nature of their reports (West, 2012). These reports were made for Morocco, so it gave an idea and information that was given to the CIA and FBI that what were the operations that Soviet Intelligence was planning to perform around the world. It also talked about the Soviet espionage and that Julius Rosenberg and Ethel were involved in it (Waller, 1999, pg, 113-119). The evidence of this information was given by different people such as Whittaker Chambers, Elizabeth Bentley, Hede Massing. The information came out to be true and it was also authenticated by VENONA. He also talks about the importance of British dimension on this specific matter. He says that a lot of people read this word "Venona" and consider it an American undertaking, but it was an Anglo-American undertaking from the very start. He has given information about the TICOM groups that is the

“Target Identification Committees”(Alluson, 1982). According to West, these TICOM groups were there to seize the crypto equipment from the enemy from the Western Front. He also talks about the importance of TICOM 6 because it arrived six days before the Soviets came and it stayed hidden at the Bergscheidungen which was a big castle outside Leipzig (O’halpin, 1987, pg. 168-171). Thus, it gave a huge insight into what was happening at that time and the historiography of the British Intelligence Community.

Furthermore, in his article, “SOE’s achievements: Operation Gunnerside Reconsidered”, West has done an analysis of performance wartime of SOE. In that analysis he says that Professor’s Heisenberg’s effort in building a nuclear weapon was destroyed when SOE directly intervened, it is important that we compare it to the Gunnerside operation due to which the Nazi production destroyed the stocks that were remaining known as the “heavy water” (Johnson, 2007). He also poses a question that “is it right of us to think that such proposition can be sustained?”.

He also talks about the Horsk hydro-electric plants which was located at the Vermork. This hydro-electric plant was a major target of British and they had also attacked this plant several times both by air and from the ground. He says that the first attempt was done in 1942 and in that attack two gliders with commandos died (Jackson, 2004, pg. 139-169). The people that did not die in the attack were murdered by the German captors. He talks about another incidence where in 1943 eleven men were also knocked out in the Norsk production capacity. This later somehow returned to the full capacity by the mid-August. Following these two events a third event occurred in 1944 In which remaining stocks of water and the Norsk Hydro’s equipment were sunk on their journey towards Germany (Barbier, 2008). According to him, he says that it was justified to say that SOE operation was a success. This also talked about the SOE intervention and its significance in forcing Germany to leave the entire program. West also noted that Hitler’s

physicist, Werner Heisenberg had told the staff that it could take three more years in making of a bomb, thus due to this they closed down the research, and since the “heavy water” was a part of the project which was focused on creation of bomb thus it directly forced the German to close the program and not pursue it (West,2012). Thus, West articles have given a huge insight into the historiography of the British Intelligence.

Nigel West has also presented a exhaustive survey of the British Security Service and the British Secret Agency. He focuses on his central argument that people have mere assumptions about both of these institutions but these both (MI5) and (SIS) have entered the public domain (Waller, 1999, pg, 113-119). Ever since these organizations have been created, they have successfully intervened in the public sphere in the form of fictionalize memoirs, and the classical spy fiction. This helps people learn a lot about the involvement of British intelligence in public domain and also about the historiography of the British Intelligence. (Alluson, 1982). West also mentions the involvement of M16 in the secret war in Palestine. West in his works mentions the collapse of spy ring due to which the Suez campaign happened which turned out to be bad. He made interesting comments on the coup of Iran, GRU officer Tokaev, exfiltration of Oleg Gordievsky.

Critique:

Several authors have raised questions about the working of intelligence in different areas of the world-East and the West. Some authors have given good reviews about the work of West. They call it “a broad, name-intensive survey of British, French, U.S, and Soviet intelligence” and “prefers attention to detail and the occasional anecdote to make his points. (O’halpin, 1987, pg. 168-171). This makes the book a good read as well as a good reference to some of the available literature”. Peterson reviews works of West by saying that West’s work is highly recommended as it contains substantial collateral information. It also covers the exhaustive history of the

British intelligence as it also represents an anthology of the history of British intelligence. West in his work has relied upon others to make his judgement. This has contributed in bringing the material together from several sources into a bigger presentation of his work. Some author says that they find a lot of errors and various questionable statements so they describe it as ‘‘simply unreliable synopsis of what is already available’’. Glees says that West offers his audience with a wealth of evidence on the work of SIS i.e Secret Intelligence Service which is not easy to find anywhere else. West’s book and work has been given titles of ‘‘genuinely revealing’’, ‘‘big success’’, ‘‘offers great profit and great care’’ (Waller, 1999, pg, 113-119). This is because his work has provided a successful insight into the historiography of British Intelligence and also provides plausible balancing successes. Some authors have critiqued the work of Nigel West as well. According to Roca and Dziak ‘‘This is a straightforward but uneven history of MI5’’. According to them, West has only focused on the working of MI5 operations against the German activities. Whereas, some authors have different comments on the similar work. The author calls West’s work to be the most detailed work ever published on the workings of M15 (Jackson, 2004, pg. 139-169). West work and his contribution in the historiography of British intelligence is considered to be a ‘‘well documented survey’’ of the intelligent services by the British. Work of West is extremely important for the historiography of British Intelligence as it is a huge compilation of the biographies and the writings of the Britian’s servants and specially the most secret ones. His work is thus considered of great importance and is said that it has produced a bedside reader, his work has entertained, compiled important information, and proves to be of great importance as there is a full history and detailed biographies of secret servants (Jackson, 2004, pg. 139-169).

Conclusion:

As an author, West has kept his focus on the issues related to intelligence and his work has often made headlines as well due to the controversies it followed. He has also been a speaker at different seminars related to intelligent subject matter. He has offered a special contribution and has traced down the wartime double agent ‘‘GARBO’’ (O’halpin, 1987, pg. 168-171). He was reported that he died in 1949 but his modern historical espionage has been able to trace down the former agents as well. This has also persuaded them to tell their stories. West was the first person in history to interview mistress of Admiral Canaris who was basically responsible for the exposure of Edward Scott and Leo Long as the Soviet Spies. He has also written detailed biographies of secret agents and also edited a lot of work. His edited work includes ‘‘The Guy Liddell Diaries’’ (Johnson, 2007). This was the daily journal of the work at the wartime of MI5. Despite a lot of reasons and contributions of West in British Intelligence, he also made a series of contributions in the study of the wireless traffic. He made a study on the penetration of the British Intelligence and the Communist Party in the Great Britain. Thus, by all the examples mentioned above, we can say that Nigel West has made a valuable contribution to the historiography of the British intelligence community (Barbier, 2008).

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