

**Herman, Michael. Intelligence Power in Peace and War.
London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs,
Cambridge University Press, 1996.**

John Ferris

Volume 18, numéro 1, spring 1998

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs18_01br01

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-5673 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ferris, J. (1998). Compte rendu de [Herman, Michael. Intelligence Power in Peace and War. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Cambridge University Press, 1996.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 18(1), 155–156.

Herman, Michael. *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

The boundary between intelligence and scholarship is notoriously permeable, sometimes to the benefit of both professions. Michael Herman is the most significant figure to cross that border in recent years. He is an old intelligence hand, who served throughout the Cold War at the British code breaking agency, GCHQ, and for two years as Secretary to the Joint Intelligence Committee. After retiring from government service, he became a leading academic student of intelligence, attached at various times to Nuffield College, Oxford, and the War Studies Department at King's College, London, a regular and respected participant on the intelligence conference circuit and a contributor to specialist journals.

Intelligence Power in Peace and War represents the culmination of his scholarship to date. It is a study of intelligence as applied science, that mixture of theory, history, management, and criticism of the discipline familiar through well-known works by Sherman Kent, Scott Breckinridge, Roger Hilsman, Ray Cline, Walter Laqueur and Bruce Berkowitz and Allan Goodman, among others. Such works generally focus on whatever American experience and concerns were dominant in their day, on the OSS-CIA tradition of collection and the American pattern of intelligence analysis and its impact on decision-making, and they treat these matters as universal norms. Herman's study is different from these because he is unlike their authors. He has a greater range and depth of experience than any of them, excepting Cline, and he is the first senior British officer and the first signals intelligence professional to produce this sort of study. This double first gives him room for greater perspective, which he exploits with unusual intelligence and power.

Intelligence Power in Peace and War has one notable weakness on the theoretical side. The eponymous concept of "intelligence power" is illustrated in part but never explained in full, beyond a reference to Lawrence Freedman's vague definition that power is the "capacity to produce effects that are more advantageous than would otherwise have been the case." Many of Herman's asides will assist the creation of a theory of intelligence (for example, "offensive intelligence superiority tends to produce better information security for its own side than the enemy's, and intelligence inferiority the reverse. Good intelligence has defensive applications which degrade the enemy's collection"; as with blitzkrieg, "victory in the intelligence and security contest goes to whoever seizes the technical initiative, makes the first offensive breach and exploits it to the full," pp. 145, 177), but these insights have not been presented as systematically as they might have been.

Again, Herman discusses conceptual issues like images, perceptions, surprise, intelligence failures and successes, in a sound and thorough fashion, but not a particularly original one. None the less, this work is an excellent blend of historical background, contemporary analysis, professional judgement and managerial sense, and his discussions of all these matters are better than those in any comparable study. It rests on the best brief account of intelligence history between 1800 and 1997 on record. It continues with well organized sections on sources, collection, processing, assessment, counterintelligence and security and the internal politics and the international relations of

intelligence services, proffers a user's manual on the management of intelligence communities, and ends with a notable contribution to the genre of works on the future of intelligence. Herman is entirely up to date with the literature, his views of its value are judicious and he synthesises it with effect. The work requires careful reading -- not because it is written poorly; on the contrary -- but rather because the hasty reader will miss many gems of wisdom, that for example, "the most dangerous of an agent's weapons is uncontrolled access to a Xerox copier." (p. 65) Many of Herman's off-hand observations -- that the meat and potatoes of Western signals intelligence during the Cold War was the production of a mass of material on Soviet and satellite military forces, or that "there is an element of macho satisfaction in an intelligence line of tough realism, free of delusions . . . it is more satisfying, safer professionally and easier to live with oneself and one's colleagues as a military hawk than as a wimp. In the Cold War intelligence seemed more useful when demonstrating new Soviet military capabilities and causing something to be done about them, than from studying Soviet limitations" (p. 247) -- will assist the study of Cold War intelligence. Even more, the work is a quiet polemic in the continuing debate between conservatives, liberal realists and libertarians regarding the role and value of intelligence in the Cold War, and about how the lessons of this history should be interpreted and enacted. Herman expresses his arguments with effect and his criticisms in a characteristically gentle fashion, his critique of the Western intelligence performance during the Cold War era is persuasive, and his ideological sympathies are clear (Mrs. Thatcher would not have seen him as "one of us"; neither will Noam Chomsky). This work is required reading for every specialist in the field and it should become the standard textbook for undergraduate courses in contemporary intelligence.

John Ferris
The University of Calgary