

James R. Clapper: Facts and Fears: Hard Truths From a Life in Intelligence, Viking Press, 2018.

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For a first-hand account by somebody whose entire almost life (he is over 80) was spent in the Intelligence community, it would be difficult to find a better guide. This memoir covers the successes and failures of an institution designed to protect us from external forces meaning us harm. Clapper is honest to a fault, considered blunt and fearless in speaking truth to power (see some of his Congressional hearings) and yet the first to acknowledge that the human beings in Intelligence can sometimes miss things, can sometimes get things wrong. Nonetheless, their successes far outnumber their misses.

Clapper stepped down in January 2017 as the fourth US director of National Intelligence, serving for six and a half years as President Obama's senior intelligence advisor and five decades serving presidents of both parties. This was longer than his three predecessors combined. He was there during the successful raid on Osama bin Laden, the Benghazi attack, the leaks of Edward Snowden, and the Russian campaign to affect the 2016 American election. During all of these operations, the last three of which were less than stellar, he testified at hearings, walking the tightrope of telling the facts while not revealing classified information that needed protection.

The Russian attack on our election, however, was the final outrage that pushed him into doing what intelligence officials rarely do: go public. His inside experience as unfolded in this book and his uncharacteristic public statements about the dangers that face our institutions makes this an important work. By making it an account of his life since childhood, he humanizes the experience of a lifetime spent in a discrete and often secretive institution. He states bluntly that the Russian attacks on our institutions (election, courts, news media), which our current President is doubling down on, requires an all-hands-on-deck rally to protect our democracy.

Clapper has joined a fellow intelligence chief, Michael Hayden (see my review) and others (diplomats, Supreme Court justices, and journalists) in attempting to educate the American public about their disciplines and why they matter. These books, however, will only influence those Americans who read and take the trouble to vote.

Clapper confesses that until the shocking results of the 2016 election, he had not realized just how much frustration with and resentment toward Washington those communities who voted for Donald Trump had, and how deep the anger went. The Russians, apparently, did know, and they played on it. There also appeared to be indications that the Russians were probing the Trump campaign organization to offer their aid in winning. Clapper says that we don't yet know how much their efforts were responsible for this unexpected win, but we do know that they played a role.

The Obama administration knew about this Russian conspiracy, but were reluctant to seem to be "putting a thumb" on the scale of the election. We soon learned that the Russians had both feet on it. But there were other events that had already poisoned the waters, such as the Edward Snowden wholesale dump of classified information and the Julian Assange Russian-supported operation of hacking and publishing. They fueled distrust.

Clapper was born into the intelligence business. He notes that both the earliest notions of a US Intelligence Community and the menace of the Soviet threat to the West were born about the same time as Clapper was. His father had been drafted into the Army in 1944 when James was 3, and as a signals intelligence officer he supported intercepting Japanese and German communications to help the Allies win the war. His father remained in the Army and led the family to many of the world's lesser garden spots that his assignments took him. Clapper learned early never to talk about what his father did. This lifetime of protecting secrets makes his current book even more remarkable. He provides us with the Intelligence Community, warts and all.

He writes: "My hope is to capture and share the experience of more than fifty years in the intelligence profession, to impart the pride that intelligence officers take in their work, the care with which they consider the ethical implications of surveillance and espionage, and the patriotism and willingness to sacrifice that they bring to the job. And finally, I intend to show what Russia did to the United States during the 2016 election was far worse than just another post-Cold War jab at an old adversary. What happened to us was a sustained assault on our traditional values and institutions of governance, from external as well as internal pressures. In the wake

of that experience, my fear is that many Americans are questioning if facts are even knowable, as foreign adversaries and our national leaders continue to deny objective reality while advancing their own \221alternative facts.\222 I believe the destiny of the American ideal is at stake."

I think so too.

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