

Michael V Hayden: The Assault on Intelligence: American National Security in an Age of Lies

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The unexpected election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016 has spurred a library of new books explaining to the public how America's most important institutions work and why we have them. This particular president has little patience for institutions that may constrain his authority, which differs from the norms followed by most of our former presidents, regardless of political party. Governing power, traditionally, is shared among: elected congress, State Department (diplomacy), Defense (military strength), Justice (law and order), the press (non-state run) and the Supreme Court (final arbiter of law).

Jon Meacham provided us with a scholarly overview of our presidents, both good and bad; his standard for good involves those presidents who could encourage our "better angels," (see my review of Jon Meacham, *The Soul of America: The Battle For Our Better Angels.*)

Michael Hayden's new book: *The Assault on Intelligence*, is just one of several to address fact-based truth vs. "alternate truth," essential to protect our national security from internal and outside enemies. Hayden is a conservative Republican who, like others in his position in national security, put his personal politics aside to serve our country. He last served George W. Bush as Director of the National Security Agency and before that, the director of the CIA.

He explains why he wrote this book: "Two months into the Trump administration, Jim Comey, the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Admiral Mike Rogers, the director of the National Security Agency, were asked in an open congressional hearing if the president they were serving was misleading the nation with his claims that they or their British friends had wiretapped him while he was president elect." Both men answered that this was untrue, contradicting the president. They were also asked if the Trump administration had given them instructions to address the blatant Russian interference in our presidential election, they said no such direction had been given.

This was a remarkable instance that was contrary to a century of security services. Despite their informed opinion, the president continued to insist that the Obama administration had wiretapped his campaign. This was his alternate truth, provided without proof.

Hayden has had plenty of experience up close to dictatorships and anarchy. In 1994, American Intelligence, serving the American forces in Europe, provided intelligence to badly stretched UN forces trying to keep the peace among the Serbs, Croats, and Muslim factions in the disintegrating former Yugoslavia. He watched the lovely city of Sarajevo, once a cultured, tolerant, vibrant city, descend into murderous anarchy on all sides. What struck Hayden was how thin the veneer of civilization is and how easy it is to destroy it.

He writes: "Over the years it became clear to me that the structures, processes, and attitudes that protect us from Thomas Hobbes's world of 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' lives are not naturally occurring things. They are inherently fragile and demand careful tending if they are to survive."

We are not yet in a Hobbsian world, but the structures, processes, and attitudes we rely on to prevent those kinds of occurrences are under serious stress. We are being attacked by something called the "post-truth world: over-valuing opinion and preference at the expense of proof and data. This a total reversal of the Enlightenment values which have served us well for three centuries.

Hayden warns that intelligence shares a broader duty than just to survive: sharing the pursuit of truth with scholars, journalists, and scientists, all in pursuit of objective reality. A major concern of Security is that "Russia has been actively seeking to damage the fabric of American democracy, a policy that converges with a mutually reinforcing swirl of presidential tweets and statements, Russian-influenced social media, alt-right websites and talk radio, Russian press like RT, and even mainstream U.S. media like Fox News---all of whom do things for their own purposes, but all of which fits nicely with Russian purposes to sharpen and sustain divisions

here."

The rest of this book is a page turner, and well worth reading. He admits that the Intelligence community itself, along with the two presidents who have served during and after the 9-11 Islamists terror attack have focused so much on this struggle spilling out of the Muslim world and almost totally ignoring a continued clandestine war on us from post-Communist Russia. Neither of these enemies (Militant Islam nor Russia) poses the capability of global destruction that existed during the Cold War, but both have threatened American values and existence that could be damaging to our future.

Michael Haden is a credible authority, as well as being a decent man who has spent his life in service to this country. I cannot recommend this book enough.

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